





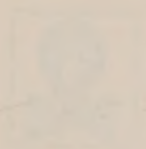






# RECIPE FOR HOMICIDE

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BY  
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## RECIPE FOR HOMICIDE



## I

Calvin Quirk, the assistant general manager, glared at Gilmore over the bloodless tips of his tightly interlaced fingers, and Gilmore glared back. Gilmore always glared back. It was pathological. In the words of Papa Lenormand, the master chef, Gilmore was a *contriste*. He was automatically against anything that someone else thought he should be for.

"It's impossible, Mr. Quirk," Gilmore said. "We can't call it off at this late date. I've got a million dollars' worth of talent and two million dollars' worth of radio and motion picture equipment mobilized for this pitch. Of course, if you want to get four networks, three newsreel outfits, and the trained seals from a dozen newspapers hating the Barzac Soup Company, go ahead and call it off."

Mr. Quirk disapproved with his eyebrows. "Mr. Evans isn't going to like this," he said.

"He approved my idea originally."

"Yes, I know. But that was before Mr. Evans began to suspect that this man Froley was a——"

"Look, Mr. Quirk." Gilmore pronounced "mister" as though he relished the fact that the word rhymed with "clyster." "This is going to be Frances Froley's show. I don't know anything about her husband's politics, but I'll undertake to guarantee that Chris Froley won't stick his nose inside the plant tonight. Anyhow, I don't see what Froley's suspected connections have to do with his wife being the world's champion carrot peeler."

"Mr. Evans has written to the F.B.I.," said Mr. Quirk, pursing his lips in a manner that reminded Gilmore of a hen about to lay an egg. "He would prefer that this other matter be cleared up before the name of Froley be publicized by us. The matter was brought to his attention only last week, just before he went

to bed with his last asthmatic attack. He wrote to the F.B.I. immediately, and they are undoubtedly investigating. However, they are conspicuously thorough and doubtless haven't had time to reply as yet."

"I don't suppose Mr. Evans has heard about that invention by Dr. Alexander Graham Bell," Gilmore said. "But there's a new gadget coming into fairly wide use by which the human voice can be made to run along wires."

Mr. Quirk's eyebrows and lips expressed double disapproval.

"Mr. Evans is a very methodical person," he said. "He wants things in writing, for the record. Am I to tell him, then—?"

"You can tell the boss," Gilmore declared, "that if he exercises his prerogative and calls the show off, he'd better start looking for a new director of public relations, because my name will be mud from here to Kamchatka. My usefulness to Barzac will be over—unless the show goes on."

He walked from the assistant manager's office feeling very pleased with himself. He probably looked pleased, too, because three secretaries smiled at him as he passed. Secretaries smiled at him, though, even when he wasn't aglow with inner satisfaction. He was not only the living spirit of contradiction, but his very appearance was self-contradictory—a sort of walking paradox that appealed to the basically paradoxical nature of womankind.

To the naked eye, Robert Gilmore was both a nice boy and a tough guy—a sort of pink cheek by blue jowl, so to speak. His shy, boyish smile didn't match his bold, confident, brown eyes. His stubborn chin contradicted his soft, humorous lips. He had a sensitive nose—and hands that could throw a football as though it were a crab apple. His well-muscled, spare frame, tense in repose, suggested a military man and a martinet; but he walked with an ambling gait. His wavy chestnut hair was groomed to perfection, yet he affected a tweedy bagginess far beyond the call of Bond Street.

Women probably liked him because he appealed equally to their maternal instinct and their occult masochism.



Most women, that is. Some women—Barbara Wall, for instance—seemed to have a hearty dislike for him, and with reason. A good many, such as Frances Froley, for whom Gilmore had decreed that the show must go on, regarded him with comfortable indifference. At least Gilmore had thought so until that night of Mrs. Froley's glory, the night she was crowned Carrot Queen.

The coronation ceremony, which was of course Gilmore's idea, was not just the mad extravaganza of a wild-eyed press agent; it had a serious purpose. Gilmore was conferring queen-ship on Mrs. Froley not to glorify the carrot, but to publicize Barzac Soup's good labor relations on the eve of new contract negotiations with the union. Barzac wanted very much to renew its contract on the same terms as the old one—\$1.04 an hour base pay for women workers, a few cents more for men. Perhaps \$41.60 for a forty-hour week was not the gateway to great wealth, but a skillful worker at Barzac could take home double that amount, including bonus pay.

Frances Froley, for instance, was just one of fifty other girls in the third-floor carrot operation of Barzac's Main Building. Her dexterity in peeling and trimming carrots, however, produced double the quantity of required vegetables per day, which meant that she earned more than \$100 a week when she was in top form. Consequently Gilmore had decided to declare Frances the world's champion carrot peeler. For press, radio, newsreels and television, however, he thought that "Carrot Queen" would be more euphemistic.

So the show went on—and Frances responded royally. Petite, plump, warm-eyed, and dark-haired, she smiled for the cameras, laughed for the microphones, and embraced Mr. Eugene Evans, the general manager, who arose from his sick bed to present her with a scroll and a gold compact. She put on her blue smock and posed on the carrot line until the third floor was ankle deep in flash bulbs. Then she took off her smock, pinned on her orchid corsage (courtesy of Public Relations Director Gilmore), fluffed out her photogenic bangs, and turned on as ingratiating

a smile as any Hollywood starlet—to show how a Carrot Queen looked and acted when off duty. She sat on a retort basket and crossed her legs for the newsreels. She admitted coyly to a coast-to-coast radio audience that some weeks she made more money than her husband, even if he was a union shop steward, but that if she ever had any children she didn't think she would bring them up to be champion carrot peelers.

All in all, it was a top-notch show, and everyone was delighted—particularly the Carrot Queen herself, who expressed her appreciation by printing a red cupid's-bow on each cheek of the impresario.

"It's all been so wonderful, Mr. Gilmore," she said. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Don't try," Gilmore said. "The shoe's on the other foot. You were wonderful."

"I've never been in pictures before. Do you think I'll look glamorous on the screen, Mr. Gilmore?"

"How can you help it? You were magnificent. Wasn't she, Mr. Remington?"

Bart Remington, Barzac Soup's new production manager, agreed heartily. Everything Remington did was hearty. He exuded dynamism. He hadn't been at Barzac a week before he also exuded the impression that he would be top dog there some day, despite his youth, and he didn't care who knew it.

"Tremendous," Remington said. "It was a tremendous idea of yours, Gilmore. Congratulations. I hope Miss Wall's stunt with the Army rations goes off half as well."

"So do I," said Gilmore without conviction.

"But you don't think it will?"

"I think it's all wrong. I sent a memo to Mr. Evans today on the subject. Didn't my secretary send you a copy?"

Remington hadn't seen the memo. He said, "Why not come over to my shanty now and we'll talk about it. I've got a few bottles on the ice. Bring Mrs. Froley, of course," he added. He smiled briefly at the lipstick on Gilmore's cheek, then pointedly ignored it while he busied himself with packing his cameras and

his portable wire recorder. Remington recorded all phases of Barzac activity, on film and on magnetized wire, with the enthusiasm of a young lover out to capture every word and gesture of his beloved. He took color movies of the making of chicken-okra soup, and of the intramural bowling finals between the Ox Tail and Cream of Celery teams. He made sound recordings of board of directors' meetings, and of the presentation of gold watches (for twenty-five years' service) to sales executives and to washroom attendants. He was, by unanimous opinion, deeply in love with Barzac, with the all-encompassing, possessive love which a man may have for a woman.

"How about it, Gilmore?" Remington repeated. "A glass or two of the bubbly?"

Gilmore hesitated. The edifice which Remington called "my shanty" was an imposing neo-Georgian mansion in the swank Lakeside Park section of Northbank, surrounded by four acres of lawn, half an acre of hydrangeas, and fifty tons of cast-iron animals. Behind its fluted columns, Remington lived in solitary splendor—if the definition of solitude could be expanded to include the six servants who ministered to his opulent bachelorhood. Remington loved to hold business conferences in this lush setting because it supported his contention that he was a serious-minded, self-made man despite his modicum of inherited wealth. He had, it would seem, learned the canned soup business from the bottom up. Having already heard several times how in just six years Remington had risen to be assistant production manager of Zenith Soups before coming to Barzac, Gilmore looked for a graceful way out.

"Couldn't we talk tomorrow, Mr. Remington?" he asked. "I've had a tough day, and I'd sort of like to get home."

"I understand," said Mr. Remington, with a broad wink which indicated to Gilmore that he did not understand at all.

"But you will drop me off on your way home, won't you, Mr. Gilmore?" said Frances Froley, while Remington winked again. The Carrot Queen slipped her hand into the crook of Gilmore's elbow. "If it won't be too much trouble—"

"No trouble at all," Gilmore said.

And there wasn't any—on the way home. Frances said a lot of silly things about the newsreel shots being like screen tests, and did Gilmore think she might get into pictures, if they turned out all right? And Gilmore made some equally silly reply that the Hollywood talent scouts would probably come flocking to Northbank once they had a glimpse of the Carrot Queen unfolding her charm before the cameras.

When Gilmore stopped his car in front of the Froley house, Frances made one final repetitious remark about how wonderful everything was, and then turned her face up to his expectantly. So Gilmore kissed her.

It really wasn't much of a kiss at the outset. Gilmore had intended it to be no more than a friendly goodnight peck, a sort of badge of merit and appreciation for Frances's turning in a superlative job as Carrot Queen. True, the kiss was no great hardship, because Frances Froley was a pleasant armful as well as a provocative eyeful. But it stemmed from no compelling drive, not even a contradictory desire for Frances because she was married and theoretically off-limits. It was something of a surprise, therefore, when the goodnight kiss blew up with catharine-wheels, Roman candles, and triple-burst rockets.

With a little sigh, Frances flung her arms around his neck, pressed her lips against his with complete abandon, seemed to insinuate herself into his very being. Gilmore's reaction may not have been due entirely to surprise, but he certainly lost immediate control of the situation. For at least twenty dizzy seconds, he did nothing to disturb the mood. He did not see or hear Chris Froley come down the walk from the front porch. He was not, in fact, aware of Froley's presence until Froley leaned his elbows on the top of the car door.

"That's about enough now, folks," Froley said quietly. "Better break it up. Go in the house, Frankie."

Frances Froley unwound like a broken watch spring.

"Chris, you scared me," she gasped. "You aren't going to act like a heel now, are you, Chris?"



"Go in the house, Frankie," Froley repeated with ominous calm.

"Don't get tough with your wife, Chris," Gilmore said. "There's no reason for it."

"Inside," said Froley, opening the car door. "Now."

"Look, Chris. Don't do anything foolish. Please." There was a strange note of hysteria in Frances's voice, part panic, part menace. "Because if you——"

Froley interrupted his wife by gripping her arm. With an effortless movement he dragged her from the car. She stumbled up the walk toward the house, uttering queer, unintelligible sounds, half words, half sobs.

Gilmore got out of the car, but he did not follow her. The big, handsome shop steward from the Barzac plant barred the way. Gilmore wanted to keep Frances from getting the day-lights kicked out of her, but he wasn't sure how to go about it. Interfering in a husband-wife quarrel was like poking a finger into a buzz saw.

"Get in, Chris," he said after a moment's hesitation. "Let's drive around for a while. Maybe you want to get things off your chest. We can talk. . . ."

Froley did not move. "I got nothing to say to you," he declared, "except one thing. Stay away from my wife. If you don't, I'll kill you."

"Stop worrying about your wife, Chris. She's as straight as they come."

"What do you want from Frankie, anyhow?" Froley demanded savagely. "Haven't you got enough women of your own, with the whole plant to pick from? What are you trying to get out of her?"

"I asked your wife to help put over a little publicity stunt for Barzac tonight," Gilmore said. "She performed like a real trouper. You ought to be proud of her."

"Sure," Froley sneered. "Proud of her through a knothole in the leftfield fence. You tried to send me on a wild-geese chase to Boone Point tonight, didn't you—so you'd have Frances to

yourself? Well, I didn't go to Boone Point. I took sick leave. Some people make me sick. People like you. Get the hell out of here before I get sick on your fender, Gilmore."

Gilmore uttered a series of disapproving clucks. "No, no, Chris, that's not it. You ham it too much. You're miscast. You don't make a good outraged husband."

"You son of a——"

Froley lunged and swung with more anger than skill. Gilmore ducked and sidestepped deftly. Froley's fist clanked metallically against the side of the car, he stumbled off balance and went down on one knee. Gilmore pushed him flat, stepped over him, got into his car. Froley began to sputter profanely.

"I'd like to hear more, Froley," Gilmore said, as he jabbed at the starter, "but I haven't time now. Write me about it some day, will you?"

Gilmore did not drive off immediately; he didn't want to give the impression of running away. Froley, however, seemed in no mood to resume hostilities. He was on his feet now, but was carrying on only psychological warfare, muttering threats adorned with purple four-lettered tassels. He repeated himself.

"Goodnight, Chris," Gilmore said at last, putting his car in gear.

He drove home with Chris Froley's threats smoking in his ears and the taste of Frances Froley's kiss still warm on his lips, and he didn't like any of it. He particularly didn't like the perfect timing of the next-to-last scene. Was it pure coincidence that Froley was sitting on his front porch in the dark at the very moment his wife's sudden and unexpected passion burst into flame, causing her to throw her arms around Gilmore's neck? It must have been. Gilmore could think of no other explanation. There was no sense in working the old badger game on him; he wasn't well-heeled enough. And he could figure out no connection with the suspicions against Froley that the front office had been worrying about that morning. Why would Froley work up an excuse to threaten to kill Gilmore,

just because the big boss of Barzac Soup had written to the F.B.I. to inquire about his politics?

It was all very puzzling, Gilmore mused, unless you took the simplest explanation: that women on the whole were just a damned nuisance. Once they grew up, they seemed to gravitate toward a career of making trouble for men. Probably couldn't help it. Frances Froley was just like the rest of them—Barbara Wall, who had come back into his life to pester him; or Zina, the Moroccan dancer who had once been his wife for nearly a month; or . . . Well, maybe not like Peggy Bayliss, who was a pal, but who had probably been a pain in the thyroid for somebody. The hell with them. . . .

Gilmore drove his car into his garage and closed the doors. He noted as he walked toward the house, the house in which he had been born, that there was a light burning in a rear window—his mother's room. He hurried his step, opened the front door with some trepidation. The nurse met him in the hall. He said, "Is anything—?"

"She's all right, Mr. Gilmore," the nurse said. "I just made her a cup of tea. She's having a little trouble getting back to sleep. The telephone woke her up."

"Who phoned?"

"Some woman for you. She wouldn't leave her name. She called three times."

Gilmore opened the door of his mother's room very softly. The fact that the lights still burned was no guarantee that his mother was not asleep. She wouldn't know one way or the other. When he saw that her sightless eyes were open, he said:

"Victoria, you've been carousing again! You know very well that no decent people are awake at this hour. Why can't you be more careful of our reputations? Why aren't you asleep?"

"Your girls!" Mrs. Gilmore's voice was reproachful, but she was smiling. "They keep ringing up at all hours."

"I'll call a mass meeting tomorrow and lay down the law. I thought I'd made it plain to them that you weren't to be disturbed at night."

"That won't do any good, son. There's only one way to get them to stop all this nonsense. Marry one of them."

Gilmore made a face, but he kept the scowl out of his voice. Even if he had assumed filial responsibility largely because so many people had advised against it, it was his own very private business and he would never admit, even to himself, that it was onerous.

"Impossible," he said. "You know you're the only woman in my life, Victoria."

Mrs. Gilmore held out her thin hand. "You've had a long day, son. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Victoria. Go right to sleep now, or I'll have to bring you a slug of that terrible bourbon you gave me last Christmas."

As he closed the door, Gilmore wondered who had been phoning him with such insistence and why. It was probably not Barbara Wall. It might have been Peggy Bayliss—or even Frances Froley.

He went to bed half expecting the phone to ring again, but it didn't.



## II

Maybe it was the weather. Maybe it was the general malaise, macrocosmic and microcosmic, that permeated the steamy August morning. It was hot, all right, and it was tomato time. The Barzac plant had been pretty much of a madhouse anyhow since the new administration took over, and during the two months of the tomato season, it was going to be bedlam in spades. Besides, there was the memory of last night's contretemps with Chris Froley. Whatever it was, Gilmore did not have his mind on his work.

This was unusual, for Gilmore liked his job. He believed thoroughly that canned soups were a boon not only to harried housewives but to harried husbands whose wives had neither the time nor skills to produce soup as good as Barzac's experts could create by the million gallons. But he listened with only half an ear as his secretary spoke. He was not even totally attentive to his morning mail.

"Miss Wall phoned," his secretary was saying. "She'll call back. Mrs. Froley came by to ask if she could get copies of the pictures that were in the morning papers. I told her we'd get prints for her. Mr. Remington wants you to stop by his office when you have time. . . ."

Gilmore leafed through a stack of letters. They were the same as usual. A woman in Iowa had been sick and felt in the mood for chicken soup. She had opened a can of Barzac's chicken-with-rice she had been keeping in her pantry for just such an occasion and was upset to find that it was not chicken soup at all. It was brown and had barley and little round pieces of bone in it. . . . Gilmore penciled the routine notation for a reply: Apologize for mislabeling. Send her three cans of chicken-with-

rice and her twenty-cent refund for the can of ox-tail she bought by our error. . . .

"And Miss Bayliss called several times," his secretary continued. "She'd like to see you as soon as you're free."

Gilmore rose instantly. "I'll go right up," he said.

Peggy Bayliss had an office high in the ornate tower which rose above one corner of Barzac's Main Building. Since it was just one flight higher than Gilmore's eighth-floor office, he walked. As chief of Barzac's Home Economics Department, Peggy presided over a neat, busy little experimental kitchen, where she invented new sauces and original dishes by blending Barzac soups with a pound of this and a can of that. Food editors from all over the country dropped in to sample her concoctions and to arrange exclusive rights to use her recipes in their own columns. Understandably enough, the male professional gastronomes liked Peggy, for she was a big, vivacious, dark-eyed girl with a boyish bob but a girlish figure. She was quick on the uptake and just as avid on the intake to judge from her ample but far from unpleasing contours. And she had a forthright quality about her that appealed to the female food columnists as well.

And to Gilmore.

As he climbed the stairs, Gilmore wondered what it was that had stirred him to immediate action at the mention of Peggy's name, whereas he had not moved when told that Barbara Wall had phoned—not even to return her call. It must be that he wanted to re-orient himself in the completeness of Peggy's friendship. Peggy was such a comfortable person. It was women like Peggy that men ought to marry—not madcap dancers like Zina or turbulent problem children like Barbara. . . .

"Come in, Genius," Peggy said. "I've had a six-state alarm out for you for hours."

"Did you call me at home last night, Peg?"

Peggy nodded. "I forgot about your carrot carnival," she said. "It must have been quite a thing, judging from the play you

got for the Carrot Queen in the morning papers. Did you score a personal triumph, too?"

"How's that again?"

"I mean with La Froley. I hear you took her home."

"News travels fast around here," Gilmore said.

"I have an efficient spy network," Peggy said. "That's what I called you about last night. I had a report on you from my Chicago operative."

"Who's your Chicago operative? George?" George was Peggy's ex-husband. Peggy nodded. "What's the matter? Have you fallen behind on your alimony payments again?"

"George didn't want money this time," Peggy said. "He just wanted to know if Robert Gilmore was still a good friend of mine. I told him yes. Was I right?"

"You're damned right you're right," Gilmore said.

"So George said that if you were a friend of mine, I should tell you emphatically to watch your step, that you were heading for trouble."

"He called from Chicago just to tell you that?"

"I guess he was thinking of me," Peggy said. "George thinks he still loves me, and he thought if you were heading for trouble, maybe I'd get mixed up in it too. His exact words were, 'Tell him for Pete's sake to watch his step, or he's going to land in trouble clear up to his navel.' He may have been a little tight, but he must have thought it was important, because he didn't try to reverse the charges. I refused his last two collect calls."

Gilmore frowned and sat on the edge of Peggy's desk. He didn't like this second-hand warning from George Bayliss. He had known Bayliss a long time, much longer than he had known Peggy, and he disliked intensely being under obligations to him. The several times that Bayliss had done favors for him, in college and in the Army, Gilmore had always felt uncomfortably and eternally indebted to him, even after he had done favors in return. Gilmore had not seen Bayliss since he and Peggy had separated, yet he was sure that Bayliss blamed him for the split-up. It wasn't true, of course, although Gilmore had

tipped Peggy to the fact that there was an opening at Barzac and she had come right down from Chicago.

Peggy had been set in a comfortable job on the woman's page of a Chicago daily, and she had been more or less supporting George ever since their marriage. Not that George Bayliss could be called lazy; he was always terribly busy in an idealistic sort of way, but somehow nothing he did ever paid off. He was an earnest young intellectual who wrote for the avant-garde magazines, circulated petitions for civil-rights proposals in initiative-and-referendum elections, and made eloquent speeches to left-wing groups. Even after Peggy got tired of supporting him and left him (and Chicago) for the Barzac job in Northbank, she was still fond of him. She called him "my ineffectual intellectual," but when he was knocked down for the count of nine by double pneumonia with complications, it was Peggy who picked up the hospital tab, including specialists and all the more expensive antibiotics. And she still frequently responded to less humanitarian calls from her ex-spouse.

"You know what I think?" Peggy said. "I think George has heard some of the scuttlebutt that's been going around—that the new administration is going to swing the axe around here pretty soon."

Gilmore laughed. Since he had been public relations director for Barzac Soups, he had weathered three administrations, two nasty family fights, one major change in policy, and one bit of intramural skulduggery involving homicide.

"Don't laugh, Gil. You haven't got a stainless-steel neck. And don't you realize that beautiful, bewitching and ambitious young bitch on the eighth floor has the knife out for you?"

"Who? Barbara Wall?" Gilmore laughed again. When he laughed his brown eyes grew very small, and his good-natured mouth expanded in all directions so that you could see the space between his upper front teeth. "Of course Barbara would like my scalp. Turn about is fair play. I got her fired in New York several years ago. So naturally she hates me."

"She doesn't hate you, Gil. On the contrary, I think she——"

Peggy shook her head. "Gil, you're a swell guy, so naturally you'll never understand anything about women. Not Barbara's type, anyhow. You've been ignoring her ever since she came here. Did you speak to her at the clambake last night?"

"I said good evening. She didn't stay long. She left early—with Mr. Evans."

"See what I mean? You snub her, so she takes up with the boss. You hurt her once, so she has to hurt you back. Then you'll be on equal terms and you'll have to stop ignoring her. You ought to marry her, Gil."

"Nonsense. I'd rather marry you. Why don't we get married tonight?"

"Not tonight, Gil. I have a date."

"Tomorrow, then."

"I haven't the right clothes for it, Gil. A girl can't get married in just any clothes, can a girl? Besides, it's too hot."

"Then let's have dinner instead," Gilmore said.

The phone rang. Gilmore discreetly slid off the edge of Peggy's desk and walked to the window. Peggy's office was in the northern corner of the Barzac tower. Through one window Gilmore could look west toward the river and north to the long lines of farm trucks bringing tomatoes to the cannery. Through the other, he could see the little city of Northbank stretched out on the slopes rising from the river, simmering on its eight hills like Rome plus one.

Gilmore tried not to listen to Peggy's conversation, which consisted largely of monosyllables, but something in the tone of her voice made him turn. All expression had died in her eyes, and her face was suddenly drawn. She stared at the telephone after she had hung up.

"Peg, what's the matter?"

Peggy crumpled two matches before she succeeded in lighting her cigarette. "It was George again," she said. "He's coming down from Chicago late tomorrow. He wants me to have dinner with him."

"But we have a date tomorrow night."



"I've got to see George." Peggy reached out and patted Gilmore's hand. She managed a smile. "I've got to find out what's on his mind. Close the door, Gil."

When Gilmore had complied, Peggy continued: "George had another message for you. He asked me to tell you to get rid of the book. What book, Gil?"

Gilmore shrugged. The cryptic message didn't register. "It beats me how George found out I had a book," he said, but Peggy didn't laugh. "Didn't he mention the author?"

"No. But he also asked me to tell you that Zina was poison and you'd better stay away from her. Who's Zina?"

"Zina?" Gilmore's attempted chuckle was a total failure. "The name's familiar. I seem to remember vaguely being married to a woman named Zina once, but it was a long time ago."

"I didn't know you'd been married, Gil."

"Well, I wasn't, very. Just for a few days. It didn't take. That was before I knew you."

"I'd forgotten you practically grew up with George."

The phone rang again. Peggy blew smoke at it before she picked up the receiver. "It's your secretary," she said. "The boss wants to see you—urgently."

Gilmore mopped his brow resignedly and walked down to his own floor. The stairway gave him time to assume the cool jauntiness he did not feel. When he reached the eighth floor, he made his way across the half acre of desks toward the glass-partitioned cubicles of the minor deities lining the approach to the holy of holies marked "Eugene Evans, General Manager."

"Mr. Evans can't see you now," said the girl guarding the inner portals. "He's dictating."

"He summoned me," Gilmore said. "Urgently."

"I'll tell him you're here, Mr. Gilmore."

Mr. Evans's urgency required Gilmore to spend the next twenty minutes looking out the window at the long lines of tomato-laden trucks pulling away from the grading platforms to unload their scarlet cargo at the plant across the street. He watched the bushel baskets crawl up the conveyor like a

moving red stairway, watched the farmers collect their empties on the return. . . . It looked like another fifty-thousand-ton day. . . .

At last he was ushered into the presence of a bald, gray-faced, gray-mustached, little man seated behind a huge bare desk.

"Yes, Gilmore, what is it?" said Mr. Evans.

"You sent for me, Mr. Evans," Gilmore said.

"Did I?" Mr. Evans drew a nasal inhaler from the pocket of his pongee jacket, unscrewed the cap, inserted the small white nozzle into his right nostril and inhaled audibly. "I don't seem to recall," he said. He tipped back his head and transferred the apparatus to his left nostril. The operation appeared to restore his memory. "Oh yes," he said. "Your memo objecting to the ceremony we have scheduled to mark the first shipment of the new field rations we are canning for the United States Army. Why do you object?"

"In the first place," Gilmore said, "the ceremony isn't going to move soup cans off the grocer's shelf. I thought our job was to sell Barzac soups."

"Good will, Mr. Gilmore," said Mr. Evans. "The fact that we are helping feed the Army establishes the patriotism of Barzac Kitchens. People will naturally want to buy soup made in patriotic kitchens."

"And in the second place, the whole idea is phony. We shipped our first carload of field rations out of here last week."

"I think you'd better take the matter up with Miss Wall," the general manager said. "She's promotion manager."

"The reason I called this to your attention, was that the idea was Miss Wall's originally. So obviously——" Gilmore stopped. A frown of dawning realization wrinkled his forehead. "Are you implying that Miss Wall is now my immediate superior?"

"I thought that was understood, Mr. Gilmore."

Gilmore swallowed hard to keep down the three juicy expletives rising spontaneously in his throat.

"When you brought Barbara Wall here from the East last

month," he said, "you took great pains to point out that while she was to act as promotion manager, I was to continue in my functions as public relations director. You indicated at the time that the two jobs were independent and of equal rank."

"I'm afraid you misunderstood," said Mr. Evans. "In a vast and complex organization like ours there must be a chain of command. I can quite understand your reluctance as a man to work for a woman, but——"

"I don't mind working for a woman if she can pitch them up faster than I can. I'm not against women in principle. Some of my best friends are women. I——"

"Miss Wall is a very able young woman," Mr. Evans interrupted. "She has considerable background in promoting canned soups. You know of course that she organized the campaign for Gold Label Soups that has twenty-six million Americans eating soup for lunch every day?"

"I know that I hired Miss Wall as a copywriter when I was working for an advertising agency in New York several years ago," Gilmore said. "And I know that I fired her six months later."

Mr. Evans patted his mustache with the corner of a silk handkerchief. "I can see where that might put you in a somewhat awkward position vis-à-vis Miss Wall," he said. "But I'm afraid you'll have to work out your personal problems directly with her. Thank you for coming in, Gilmore."

Gilmore made his exit feeling very virtuous at not having blown a gasket—at least prematurely. He paused just outside the holy of holies, however, to take a deep breath. Before proceeding to Barbara Wall's cubicle, he wanted to be sure he was angry enough to spend fifteen minutes in her presence without reverting to a moon-struck invertebrate.

### III

Ever since Barbara Wall had turned up in the Midwest a month before, Gilmore had known that he would have to face her eventually. He had been dismayed to learn that she was going to be his colleague at Barzac, but he was not entirely surprised. Nothing that happened at Barzac surprised him any more.

The Barzac Soup Kitchens—née Barzac Canneries—had been going through many changes of late. The original canneries had been built into a national institution by a Frenchman who had parlayed an idea, a side-street restaurant, and a few acres of tomatoes into a multi-million-dollar business with an AAA Dun & Bradstreet rating. When Jacques Barzac died and left the works to his only daughter Louise, things began to fall apart. A sticky-fingered attorney got his hand caught in the estate, and had killed the then general manager who was sensitive to the odor of corruption.\* Not long after that, Louise had disposed of her controlling interest, so that within a few years, the Barzac plant was being operated by two banks and an insurance company.

The new interests had elected a new board of directors and the new board had brought in a new management and a new policy. They had raided several of the big eastern canneries for top executives and production men, and had abandoned Barzac's traditional line of ready-to-serve soups for the condensed varieties. Condensed soups were definitely the trend. Gold Label, after hesitating for several years, had definitely given up the ready-to-serve lines it had been holding as an ace in the hole. Even Zenith had gone over to condensed soups for good.

\*Cf. "The Phantom Cry-Baby" in *Diagnosis: Homicide* by Lawrence G. Blochman. Lippincott, 1950.

So, after a brief shut-down for re-tooling and re-indoctrination of the crew of two hundred chefs, including Pierre Lenormand, the grumbling old Director of the Kitchens, who was due for retirement in a few years anyway, Barzac became a condensed-soup concern. And Barbara Wall, a bright nova in the firmament of condensed-soup publicists, had been hitched to the Barzac wagon as part of the new team.

"Hello, Gil. Come in and park," Barbara said as Gilmore stuck his head into her office.

She was a small girl, but she had indisputable stature as she sat behind her pale lemon-wood desk with cool, crisp efficiency in her cool, crisp, apple-green linen tailleur. Only Barbara Wall could be quite that cool and crisp on a steamy August day. Sheer will power, Gilmore decided, would keep Barbara cool under any circumstances. She was two parts burning ambition and three parts icy determination and the end-product was as invigorating as an evening breeze—if you remembered to wear a topcoat. Gilmore had been wearing his for years. . . .

"Mr. Evans suggested I talk to you, Miss Wall."

"Oh, Gil, stop! How long are you going to keep up this—damned nonsense?"

"It's never nonsense to show respect for the boss," Gilmore said.

Barbara laughed. It was a pleasant, genuine laugh. She laughed with her white teeth, the corners of her amber-colored eyes, her slim shoulders. She was still damned good to look at, Gilmore reflected, when she was herself. If you analyzed her features one by one, you might decide she was far from beautiful. But the ensemble was irresistibly attractive. She radiated a sort of upswept fascination—an upswept, honey-gold hair-do, upswept eyebrows (without benefit of tweezers or pencil), a smile, as the laugh subsided, that was always (perhaps a little consciously) upswept at the corners, and a nose that was upswept (just a trifle, a little roguishly) at the end.

Gilmore quickly, ostentatiously and at great length lighted a cigarette as though to dispel the whiff of bitter-sweet nostalgia



that swept up from the years like the scent of autumn smoke.

"I didn't think your memo to Mr. Evans was very respectful," Barbara said. "What's wrong with my field-rations stunt?"

"I didn't know you were my boss when I wrote that memo," Gilmore replied. "But I'd have written it anyhow. I've got great respect for the United States Army, even though it is struggling along without Gilmore these days. I don't like the idea of the Army being used as a singing commercial, so to speak, and my guess is that the Army is going to resent it, too."

"We all love the Army, Gil. But the Army is one thing and the brass hats are another. I've never seen a brass hat yet who wouldn't stand on his head to get his picture in the paper."

"You won't get any brass to come over here to open a can of field rations," Gilmore said. "At best, you'll get a lieutenant colonel from the nearest supply depot. He won't even make the wire services. You'll be lucky to get a two-column cut in the local press, and we don't have to sell soup in Northbank."

"You're wrong, Gil," Barbara's voice showed a trace of annoyance. "I'll get at least a three-star general from G-4. I've got a long-distance call in for Washington right now."

"Nuts!" said Gilmore. "And if the Army regrets?"

"The Army won't. But just in case, I've a few ideas in reserve, something the Home Economics people can work on."

The phone rang. "Put the General on," Barbara said. "Oh, hello, General. . . . Oh, you have . . . ? I see. . . . Well, as a matter of fact, I don't see, but if you— Oh, yes. Well, I think you're making a mistake, General, but if that's your decision. . . . Thanks, anyhow, General. Goodbye."

She replaced the instrument with a stroke that would have decapitated a spring lamb. The light in her amber eyes hardened, like red-hot rivet-heads cooling.

"Trouble?" Gilmore asked sweetly.

"You work fast, Gil. Who's your lobbyist in Washington?"

"I work direct. It's amazing what you can do with a few deep-frozen minks. So the Army won't play?"

"The Army has reconsidered. The Army now thinks that

calling attention to the shipment of military supplies may indicate their destination and thereby give aid and comfort to a potential enemy. Go ahead and gloat."

"I'm not even going to say I told you so."

Barbara smiled thoughtfully. "We'll go ahead with the other idea," she said. "We'll glamorize the combat rations for the American housewife—the wives and mothers of G.I.'s. We'll—"

"You'll—*what?*" demanded Gilmore.

"You heard me," Barbara said. "And don't be a case of arrested development. Don't think of rations in terms of the stuff that used to gag you while you were winning the last war. This isn't C-rations or K-rations. Bart Remington is very proud of our product. He says Papa Lenormand and his crew have turned out a field ration that actually tastes like food." Barbara paused for breath, but not for long. She resumed quickly. "Your friend Peggy Bayleaves could dress the stuff up with a sauce made from one of our onion soups or something. I can plant the recipe with any one of seven newspaper syndicates. Will you talk to Peggy about it?"

"To Peggy? Why me?"

"Aren't you in love with her? Oh, I'm sorry, Gil. I'm not keeping up with things, am I? It's the Carrot Queen now, isn't it?"

Gilmore glared. He knew exactly what Barbara wanted him to say—expected him to say, probably. So instead he laughed and said: "Barbara, your dope is old—fourteen hours old. You know I can't be faithful to any woman for that long. You're two names behind. But I'll speak to Peggy anyhow, if you want me to."

Barbara was not amused. She didn't even smile. "You hate me still, don't you, Gil?"

"I don't have time for that sort of thing. I have to keep my mind on serious things—or I'll get fired. That would even us up, wouldn't it, Barbara? That's why you came to Northbank, isn't it?"

Barbara's prim, self-confident little mouth dissolved into a distressed moue—so convincing that for a moment Gilmore was sorry he had baited her.

"Gil, we've got things to talk about, you and I. When can we talk?"

"Now."

"I mean privately—and at leisure. Dinner tonight?"

"Can't," Gilmore said. "I'm tied up."

"Tomorrow night?"

"I've got a date tomorrow," Gilmore lied.

"Soon, though. It's important, Gil."

"Soon," Gilmore agreed. "As soon as we acknowledge the debt of the U.S. Army to Barzac. We'll celebrate."

"Gil!"

The door slammed as Gilmore hurried away, taking great care not to be tripped up by his better self, a simple guy who might have wanted to put his arms around Barbara.

The important engagement which prevented Gilmore from dining with Barbara that night was at the ringside of the Northbank Sporting Club weekly fights, to watch Kid Mozart knock out Tony Spumante. The city editor of the *Tribune* had gone to college with Gilmore and always gave him seats behind the press box. Gilmore usually took his dentist, his liquor dealer, or someone else not connected with Barzac soup.

It was a dull evening. None of the preliminaries went the full distance, and the main event was a listless minuet in which the loser eagerly took a dive in the fourth round. So Gilmore got home much earlier than he expected.

He was greatly surprised and not at all pleased to find George Bayliss in his garage.

Gilmore had cut his ignition to roll the last few feet up the driveway when he saw Bayliss backed against the rear wall, spread-eagled in the glare of the headlights. He set his brakes and shouted automatically: "Bayliss!"

Bayliss's reaction was that of a marionette with an electric fan amok in the guide-strings. He had always been surprisingly nervous, superficially, for a man with such a calm, deliberate, methodically devious brain. He did a brief, mad, disjointed dance to get out of the light. He hadn't changed, Gilmore reflected, since the last time he had seen him—or since the first time, which was ten years ago. He was still the wiry, dark, intense, ageless young man with sharp features and cynical, piercing eyes.

Gilmore reached out and grabbed Bayliss's arm as he tried to sneak past. "What's your hurry, George?"

"Oh hello, Gil." Bayliss pirouetted gracefully. "I wasn't sure it was you. He arched his free arm into the car and switched off the lights.

"Hey!" Gilmore protested.

"No lights," Bayliss muttered, "and no noise. You're in trouble, Gil."

Gilmore sighed. "How much do you need this time?"

"Real trouble," Bayliss insisted. There was no banter in his voice. "Didn't you get my message?"

"Oh, that. As a matter of fact I did, but Peggy wasn't expecting you down until tomorrow night. Was she surprised?"

Gilmore was still holding Bayliss's arm. He thought he felt a tremor run through it.

"Peggy doesn't know I'm here," Bayliss said. "Do me a favor and don't tell her. Okay?"

"Why?" Gilmore asked.

"Because I'm going back to Chicago on the midnight plane, and I'll be back again, officially, tomorrow night. I just sneaked down tonight to make sure you were filled in about Zina, and I--- Well, I don't want Peggy to know I'm here."

"I see." Gilmore didn't believe a word of it. It was not like Bayliss to fly several hundred miles on a purely altruistic mission of warning. He was probably after something. The book, probably. "What about Zina?"

"When did you see her last?"

Gilmore frowned into the darkness, trying to remember what Zina had been like. It was hard to realize that she had once been his wife. He remembered vividly the first time he saw her dancing in a North African café, but the wife image was dim and blurred. . . .

"I haven't seen her in several years," Gilmore said.

"But you've heard from her recently, haven't you?"

"Not since her Reno lawyer sent me the papers."

"You'll be hearing," Bayliss said. "She's going to testify before that Senate committee next week. It puts you in a three-way jam. You can start worrying."

Gilmore couldn't see how this brief, quixotic marriage to a Moroccan dancer of vaguely European ancestry could be a menace either to the national security or his own peace of mind. He said so.

Bayliss laughed unpleasantly. "Some people don't want Zina to testify," he said. "They think you're hiding her."

"I'm not," Gilmore thought, *I'll bet you know where she is.*

"They also think you're hiding the book. You remember the book I asked you to bring home to Zina from Paris. Remember *Émile*?"

Gilmore remembered *Émile*. He had wondered at the time what interest Zina could have in Rousseau's novelized treatise on progressive education. He wondered now what had suddenly aroused the interest of the U.S. Senate in the book. Perhaps some Senator had just discovered that *Émile* had been burned in Paris in 1762. . . .

"What's wrong with *Émile*, after all this time?"

"It's hot. That's why I came down from Chicago tonight—to make sure you'd get rid of the book. After all, I got you into this, so I feel some responsibility for keeping you alive."

"Why pick on me? I delivered *Émile* to Zina according to instructions—before we were married."

"Zina didn't turn it over to the people who were expecting it. Maybe she told them you never gave it to her. They want it."



"Why?"

"My God, Gil, do I have to draw diagrams?"

"Why, sure. That hot-rod mind of yours always lost me on the turns."

"Look," Bayliss said impatiently. "You know as well as I do that Zina never heard of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But that copy of *Émile* you brought her has numbers written on the flyleaves in invisible ink. The numbers mean pages, lines, words, and letters. Once you have the key, the book is a sort of directive and organizational chart combined. The code has been changed since, of course, but the names are the same. Evidence like that can't be picked to pieces like some ex-Commie trying to get right with the world and his conscience. So don't get caught with it, Gil."

Gilmore lit a cigarette. He held the match longer than necessary because he wanted to watch Bayliss's face as he asked:

"Suppose I had the book—which I don't—what would you want me to do with it? Turn it over to you?"

Bayliss's deep-set eyes gave back the wavering yellow light of the flame. His expression did not change. When the match went out, he said:

"Get rid of it, that's all. Burn it. Flush it down the drain, page by page. Destroy it."

"Why not turn it over to the F.B.I.?"

"Are you nuts? Stay out of this thing. You've got a good job at Barzac. Keep it. And keep your nose clean. Zina's going to testify under her maiden name, so you have a good chance to staying out of things. Don't dive in headfirst. That's what I came down to tell you."

"Thanks," Gilmore said. He reflected that he was usually thanking Bayliss for getting him out of something he would never have got into originally without Bayliss.

"Well," Bayliss said, "since I gotta go, I go. But let's keep Peggy out of this, too. You did promise not to tell Peggy about my side-trip tonight, didn't you?"

"I didn't," Gilmore said. "But I will. Can I drive you to the airport?"

"Don't be a fool, Gil. You haven't even seen me in two years. Carry on, guy."

Gilmore listened to the gravel of the driveway crunching under Bayliss's retreating steps. He sat for a long time without moving. A cloud of doubts, unanswered questions, and half-remembered thoughts swarmed up out of the past. What was Bayliss really doing in Northbank? What, as a matter of fact, had he been doing in Chicago since Peggy had left him? Had he really come down without telling Peggy? Did his dire predictions about Zina and *Émile* have any basis in fact?

One of Bayliss's statements, at least, was entirely true: Zina had indeed sent back her copy of *Émile*. Apparently she had kept track of Gilmore's whereabouts; she had mailed the book to the Barzac plant scarcely a month ago. Barbara Wall had been in his office when the package arrived. Barbara knew Zina and was aware of the part the book had played in Gilmore's rapid roundtrip excursion into matrimony, so after making appropriately sarcastic remarks, she took the book home with her "to try to discover what strange and potent aphrodisiac qualities Rousseau had hidden away in *Émile*." She had not returned it.

Well, that much was fine. He could think of no better hiding place for *Émile*—if the book was really hot—than Barbara's apartment. As long as the story did not break in the newspapers—if it would ever break—she need never know she was sitting on a time-bomb. He wouldn't say anything to her for a few days, anyhow. He'd wait at least for the outcome of Peggy's interview with Bayliss.

Bayliss! Gilmore wished futilely that he'd never known Bayliss. If Bayliss had not sat next to him in English III . . . but he had, and moreover he had volunteered to ghost-write an overdue theme without which Gilmore would have flunked the course and been kicked off the football team. Gilmore had turned in the Bayliss opus without even reading it—a major

error, because the instructor commented privately on the theme to its putative author.

"Excellent piece of work, Gilmore. If anyone else had written it, I should be tempted to say that it was . . . well, perhaps somewhat derivative. But of course I could hardly suspect a varsity halfback of being familiar enough with Thorstein Veblen to have—" The sentence had ended in such a knowing, accusing smile that Gilmore immediately got Bayliss to introduce him to Veblen, waded through everything the man had ever written, and, once the football season was over, wrote an exhaustive critique of Veblen on the leisure class and craftsmanship that was even more brilliant than Bayliss's warmed-over piece of ghostmanship.

The experience taught Gilmore that he really liked putting words on paper and that consequently he wrote well.

When he graduated, Gilmore was offered a fat job playing professional football with a major-league team. So he went to work as an underpaid reporter for a minor-league newspaper.

Then the President of the United States sent Greetings, two thin gold shoulder bars emerged from the heat and dust of the Great American Desert where the armored divisions were being created, and Second Lieutenant Robert Gilmore landed in North Africa as a minuscule part of Patton's brave new tank command. Three weeks later he was transferred to the Psychological Warfare Branch.

He wrote surrender leaflets in the forward area until the Tunisian campaign bogged down. Then he was brought back to Algiers to write radio broadcasts. It was in Algiers, one night during the blackout, that George Bayliss came back into his life.

Sergeant Bayliss found Gilmore in the bar of the Cornouailles, assuming correctly that he would find his old friend in the usual PWB watering place. What about a night out in the Kasbah?

The Kasbah, being off-limits to the armed forces, was of course a challenge to Gilmore. He even refused to borrow civilian clothes—whereupon Bayliss had parked him behind a

bottle of Algerian wine in a smelly little café while he went off in search of a burnous to hide Gilmore's uniform.

Gilmore had just had time to note that the Moroccan dancer who was performing had the biggest eyes and whitest teeth that he had ever seen; that she was so homely that she was fascinating; and that she had a superb body that was excitingly expressive. Then the lights went out and somebody banged Gilmore on the head.

When he came to, the café was still dark, but a candle was burning beside an overturned chair. The place was deserted except for the dancer (her name was Zina, Gilmore learned while she was putting cold water on his head, and she was a Loyalist refugee from Spanish Morocco). Gilmore was sitting on the floor in his underwear. He was drinking the Mascara brandy Zina brought him when Bayliss returned with the burnous.

"Of all the damned fools!" Bayliss had said. "Don't you know that some people around here will pay a thousand dollars for a G.I. uniform and identity papers? I suppose they got your A.G.O. card and your dog tags, too?"

They had.

Bayliss tossed the burnous to Gilmore. "Put this on, and pull the hood forward to hide your face. Stay here with Zina until I come back. I've got to find your stuff."

Bayliss, apparently, knew his way around Algiers. He was back in half an hour with Gilmore's uniform and the identity pieces.

So naturally, when Bayliss came around to the Rue Pierre-Charron in Paris several years later and asked Gilmore to do him a small favor, Gilmore couldn't very well refuse.

He took the book to New York to give to Zina.

It was some months before Zina turned up in New York to claim it—long enough for Gilmore to get out of the Army and into an advertising agency in which his PWB major had been—and was again—a senior account executive. Gilmore was a junior executive who thought he was falling in love with a copy-

writer named Barbara Wall when he learned that Zina was dancing in a honkytonk in Fifty-second Street.

Within a month he had married Zina—"to keep her from being deported to Spain or Spanish Morocco where she'd be thrown in jail by Franco," he told himself (and Barbara Wall). "Her father, who was a political prisoner, died in prison."

Two weeks after their marriage and the day before her visitor's visa expired, Zina went to Canada to be re-admitted to the United States as the wife of an American citizen.

Gilmore had never seen her again.

He had made two unsuccessful attempts to find her. He went to Montreal one weekend and picked up a trail that seemed to lead to Chicago. He flew to Chicago to see if he could trace her through Bayliss. Bayliss denied, rather unconvincingly, that he knew where she was, except that she had passed through Chicago on her way farther west.

"Forget about her," Bayliss had said. "You're well out of it."

Gilmore thought he had done a good, quick, thorough job of forgetting until Bayliss came along with the news that she was about to barge back into his life again.

*Damn Bayliss*, he thought, as he got out of the car and went into the house. *I've enough trouble with Barzac Soup and the Froleys. I'll keep on forgetting about Zina.*

But he dreamed that night that she was married to George Bayliss.



## IV

Day began at the Barzac Soup Kitchens at 6:30 a.m. when the first shift came to work. By midmorning all eight plants, sprawled over five city blocks, swarmed with orderly confusion. Meat and vegetables poured from the receiving platforms to the hungry conveyor belts. An army of women cut, peeled, pared and sorted. Chefs stirred their seventy-gallon blending kettles with huge wooden paddles. Thousands of bright empty cans came cascading down from upper floors, overhead derricks hauled great iron baskets through clouds of fragrant steam, machines whirled and stamped; bright blue cartons of tinned soup rattled gaily from plant to warehouse on conveyor bridges high above the streets, to be rolled into freight cars waiting on a siding—a million cans a day.

In the midst of all this noisy, assembly-line cookery and packaging, however, there was always a moment of calm and quiet self-appraisal every morning at eleven, when the daily tasting session convened. The official tasters assembled around a table in the immaculate whiteness of the Standards Laboratory on the ground floor of Plant No. 1, also called the Main Building, because it harbored the administrative and engineering departments on its upper floors. The tasting session was attended by Barzac's top brass, sitting in solemn judgment on the previous day's output, eyeing the color of each soup, savoring the aroma and consistency, comparing each sip against a sip from another batch cooked the same day, against last week's soup, against last month's. The consumer must be assured that when he buys Barzac soups (with the bright blue label) he will get uniform goodness.

On the day after the Army sent regrets to Barbara Wall's field rations première, the usual standard palates were in

presence at the tasting session. There was General Manager Eugene Evans, of course, with his nasal tissues pre-shrunk so that he could appreciate the subtlest nuance of flavor. There was Bart Remington, the dynamic new production manager, with his perennial polka-dot bow tie and his sleek blond hair carefully parted in the middle. There was Calvin Quirk, the assistant to Evans, a thin, cadaverous person, to whom tasting seemed not only superfluous but inappropriate; he wore an air of having tasted everything, and, having found nothing any good, retreated to a life of buttermilk and incipient ulcers. There was also the man best qualified to be present: Pierre Lenormand, the head chef who had been with Barzac since its founding—a perpetually complaining Frenchman with a white-haired, pink-faced charm as indestructible as *la France éternelle*, a superlative craftsman with a cynical attitude toward cooking—even good cooking—by slide rule.

Absent on this particular morning were such titular members of the tasting commission as the chairman of the board, who was present only when his arthritis and dentist's appointments permitted; and the president and vice presidents who always came when they were not conferring on new bank loans, labor contracts, or plans for expansion and building.

Present on this particular morning were three persons not ordinarily invited to the daily gustatory ritual: Barbara Wall, Robert Gilmore, and Peggy Bayliss. The people whose job it was to make the consumer love Barzac soups above all other soups were not usually encouraged to get in the way of the creative operations or to pry indiscriminately into the serious business of manufacture. Barbara, however, had convinced Mr. Evans that the first official tasting of the new field rations, and their subsequent glamorization for civilian use, must be shared with all America. Even if the rations could not be launched with the splash of champagne and the flash of gold braid, at least Barzac's concern for the G.I. stomach could be established with homey charm. So Peggy Bayliss had been brought down from her inventive little tower kitchens to attend to the details

of glamorization, while Gilmore was summoned to prevent his making mischief elsewhere, since he disapproved of the whole business, and to make small talk with the photographers from two picture agencies.

Peggy, Gilmore noted, was not her usual photogenic self this morning. She seemed more than a trifle hung over. Her dark eyes lacked their customary luster, and she yawned as she investigated the contents of the ration cans.

"Didn't you get to bed at all last night?" Gilmore whispered.

"Eventually."

"Alone?"

"Of course," Peggy said. "If you really must know, I usually snore. Only not last night. I hardly closed my eyes last night. I was scared, I guess. I got quite a shock when I got home. I found I'd had burglars. I almost phoned you to come over and hold my hand, but I took a few quick drinks instead."

"Did you call the police?"

"No. The burglars didn't take anything. Just ransacked the place. I must have scared them away when I came in. But it gives you a peculiar feeling, just the same."

Gilmore, too, had a peculiar feeling as he listened. No wonder George Bayliss was so anxious for Peggy not to know he had been in Northbank last night. It must have been George who ransacked Peggy's apartment, on the chance that she might have *Émile*. Gilmore was on the point of telling Peggy the whole story, then decided against it. He would wait, first, to see what sort of story Bayliss would tell Peggy that night. . . .

"You're still seeing George tonight?" he asked.

"Far as I know. I haven't heard any more from him since yesterday."

"I'll be standing by," Gilmore said. "Call me if you need help."

"I need help right now, to face these photographers. You don't have an extra face on you, Gil, by any chance? I could use one that was about twenty years younger."

"You never looked lovelier, Peg. Just watch the birdie."

Peggy turned out two cans of field rations into a platter, then cut the fragrant brown cylinders into thin slices. She posed for the camera passing the platter to Mr. Evans and Mr. Remington. She posed with Lenormand, discussing the merits and possibilities of his creation. She posed alone, nibbling delightedly on a generous piece. She continued to nibble after the bored photographers had gone away. She had difficulty, however, in getting the upper-echelon tasters to sample the new product. They all seemed too deeply engrossed in their soup routine.

Mr. Evans, for instance, was not quite happy over the tomato soup which he alternately sipped and thoughtfully regarded in the bowl of his spoon. "Color is good," he admitted, "but I'm not quite sure about the flavor. I wonder if the tomato crop isn't running a little more acid than usual this year."

"The lab says not," Remington reported. "Acidity's been normal, and the sugar content slightly higher; not enough to affect the basic formula, though."

"Nothing is wrong with the taste of this tomato soup, I swear it to you," Lenormand insisted.

"Aren't you folks going to taste the rations?" Peggy Bayliss asked. "It's not bad, really." She bit into another slice. "Maybe it's because I'm as hungry as a G.I. Maybe it's because I overslept and missed breakfast this morning. But I really like this stuff. Aren't you having any, Mr. Evans?"

"No, thank you." The general manager was still tasting soup.

"What about you, Mr. Remington?"

"I tasted some of the first batches we made last week." The production manager waved the plate away. "I don't suppose it's changed any."

"Exactly the same," Lenormand said.

"It has a nice, spicy tang," Peggy continued. "I taste sage, and thyme. And don't I taste bay leaf, Chef?"

"In the broth there is bay leaf," said Lenormand, "the broth which moistens the beef. There is also tomato and onion and other spices."



"It slices beautifully," Peggy said.

"That is the binder," Lenormand explained. "Cereal and dehydrated egg."

"And monosodium glutamate, no doubt," Gilmore suggested, winking at Remington while he watched the reaction of the old French chef. Remington returned a questioning stare but said nothing. Lenormand said:

"Of course, monosodium glutamate. We moderns of the machine age must go for our first principles to the Chinese chefs of three thousand years ago."

"Don't you want to taste it, Gil?" Peggy held out the plate.

"May as well," Gilmore said. "This is where I came in." He speared a piece as large as a hazelnut and chewed it cautiously. His expression changed. "It is delicious," he admitted. "Congratulations, Chef. This may be our secret weapon. It's certainly a tremendous advance over the dog-food that saw us through the North African campaign."

"I'm not so sure I like it as well hot," Peggy said, forking out a portion from the steaming skillet on the electric plate before her. "Or maybe I'm just losing my appetite." She ate some more. "What about you, Barbara?"

"Not today," Barbara replied. "After you've glamorized it a little, I'll try some." She came over and put her hand on Gilmore's shoulder. Gilmore did his best to keep a poker face. How long, good Lord, before he could get this woman out of his system? How long until her mere physical proximity could no longer disrupt his ganglia, liquefy his knees, and send waves of alternate heat and cold crawling over his skin? "Gil, you did tell Peggy what I had in mind, didn't you?"

Before Gilmore could reply, Peggy Bayliss said: "Gil doesn't have to tell me what you have in mind, Barbara." Her voice was pure glacial acetic acid. "In fact, I think I know what's on your mind a lot better than Gil does."

"You *can* dress up the rations a little, can't you, Peggy?" said Barbara, ignoring the interpolation with perfect poise. "I mean, you can invent some sort of dish with Barzac's tomato soup as a



sauce? Or perhaps our mushroom bisque and a little grated cheese?"

Peggy scanned Gilmore's impassive face for a long moment. When she turned again to Barbara, her tone was completely impersonal.

"I'll give it a whirl," Peggy said, reaching for another mouthful. "It could stand a can of something and a soupçon of imagination. Send a case upstairs and I'll get at it this afternoon."

But Peggy Bayliss didn't get around to her experimental cooking that afternoon. Feeling slightly replete with her repeated servings of field rations, she postponed going to lunch and instead wrote a letter to a food editor in Kansas City to whom she had given a recipe for asparagus ring in exclusivity for six months, but who, according to her clipping service, had not yet printed it. When she finished the letter, she noted that the feeling of repletion was developing into one of nausea, so she went to the plant infirmary to lie down.

When her nausea became active, the plant physician felt her pulse and asked a series of intimate questions obviously pointing to a possible diagnosis of morning sickness. Her replies, however, were emphatically negative, so he gave her a sedative and some bismuth and soda and sent her home for the day.

By midafternoon she had developed a raging thirst, a burning stomach ache, a sore throat, and cramps in the calves of her legs. Unable to reach her own physician at the first try, and unable to stay long at the telephone between spasms of nausea, she called Bob Gilmore who got a doctor for her.

At eight o'clock that evening she was taken to Pasteur Hospital in a state of profound shock.

## V

Bayliss had called his ex-wife's apartment shortly before eight o'clock to say that he had just got off his plane and would be a little delayed in picking up Peggy.

Gilmore answered the phone and said: "Look, Bayliss, Peggy won't be having dinner with you. She's in agony. I don't know what's wrong, but she's in a bad way. We're waiting for an ambulance now. You'd better go right over to Pasteur Hospital."

It was nearly ten-thirty before Bayliss reached the hospital. They wouldn't let him see Peggy, so he joined Gilmore in the waiting room. The two men greeted each other solemnly, but neither said very much. There was plenty that Gilmore wanted to say. He wanted to talk about the ransacking of Peggy's apartment the night before. He wanted to comment on the length of time it had taken Bayliss to get from the airport to the hospital. He was curious, too, about Zina and the search for *Émile*. But none of it seemed important when the sands were running out. . . .

At quarter to eleven an intern came in with the bad news. He mumbled an embarrassed expression of sympathy and said something about tough breaks. Then he produced a blue paper and went on mumbling. Gilmore caught the phrases "next of kin . . . post-mortem . . . rotten time to be intruding . . . think it over . . . tomorrow . . ."

Gilmore took the paper and the intern retired eagerly.

Bayliss stared dumbly in white-lipped silence. He was green about the gills and he seemed to have trouble getting out of his wicker chair.

"Peggy doesn't—didn't—have any family did she?" Gilmore asked.

Bayliss shook his head.

"Then I guess you ought to sign this," Gilmore said, offering his fountain pen, "as the ex-next-of-kin."

Bayliss's hand trembled as he signed. He scarcely glanced at the paper. He said: "I . . . this thing has hit me pretty hard. I'm afraid I'm going to . . . Is there a men's room around here?"

"Around to the right, halfway down the hall."

Bayliss left on the run.

When he didn't return after ten minutes, Gilmore went after him. He was not greatly surprised to find nobody in the men's room.

Gilmore walked out of Pasteur Hospital like an automaton. He did not know exactly where his numbed legs were taking him, but he knew it was somewhere important, somewhere urgent. His thoughts were still floundering in an unfamiliar sense of confused emptiness. He could somehow not orient himself in the present. There was no present—only an overlapping past and future, a great, dazed weariness that dragged him back and a sense of impending catastrophe that urged him on. Somewhere on the other side of Northbank a clock struck eleven, and the repetition of the deep, metallic notes, muted by the warm, rainy night, restored his sense of time and space. He knew what he had to do, and he knew where he was going—in a hurry.

He found his car and started across town by the back streets where no traffic lights would stem his rush for the Barzac cannery. As he approached the plant, he began to run into traffic. The night shift was coming off, and the maintenance crews would be coming on. Plants 4 and 5 would also be working a third shift—two buildings that worked only two months in the year when the tomatoes were ripe. Every window in the Main Building was ablaze with light as Gilmore pulled up in the no-parking space in front of the entrance. He left his engine running and bounded up the steps.

In the lobby Kenneth Kavlik, Chief of the Guard Force, was

passing the time of night with the guard who was checking the badges and passes of the night workers.

"Has Mr. Evans gone home, Captain?" Gilmore asked.

"Nope. Mr. Evans left about an hour ago," Kavlik said. "He didn't say where he was going, but I'll lay odds it wasn't home. He was all decked out in his best bib and tucker. Bound for the Country Club to pick up his wife, is my guess. There's a big shindig out there tonight."

"Thanks, Captain."

"Goodnight, Mr. Gilmore."

It was only ten minutes to the Country Club by the most direct route, but that road would probably be clogged already by trucks loaded with tomatoes, queuing up for the grading platforms, their drivers asleep in their cabs. The roundabout road took him a quarter of an hour, his headlights boring through the rain, his tires singing on the wet pavement. . . .

"Leave your key in the ignition, please, sir. I'll park your car." The doorman had come running out from the porte-cochère in glistening yellow slicker, carrying an open blue umbrella.

Gilmore cranked down the window. "I'm just stepping in for a word with Mr. Evans—Mr. Eugene Evans."

"I'm sorry, sir." The doorman closed the umbrella. "I'm afraid you can't go in like this. Not with a sports jacket and no necktie, sir. It's black tie tonight, sir."

"Then will you run in and tell Mr. Evans that Gilmore must see him—urgently."

"Well, I don't know, sir. You see——" The doorman let one hand repose nonchalantly on the sill of the car window, palm upturned.

"Tell him it's a matter of life and death." Gilmore reached into his pocket and emptied a handful of loose change into the upturned palm.

"Very well, sir. I'll try to find Mr. Evans."

The doorman disappeared. Music seeped from the clubhouse to make a vibrant background for the *thwack-thwack* of the windshield wiper. It was expensive, heavily orchestrated mu-

sic, with lush strings pretentiously draped, à la Kostelanetz, on a meagre, imitative, melodic frame. The music sighed to a stop, and a tattoo of hand-clapping fluttered out into the night. Couples strolling out to the dimly lighted covered-veranda beyond the porte-cochère made a kaleidoscope of color as the women passed through the lighted doorway, a rippling gleam of neckline, miraculously suspended between red, laughing lips and the sheen of satin or a pastel cloud of organdy, a white hand clinging to the somber sleeve of a dinner jacket, flashing briefly before disappearing into the darkness of the veranda, to become a tinkling laugh and a glowing cigarette end. It was all very young and gay and alive—incongruously gay and alive, Gilmore thought. It couldn't be real. Only the *thwack-thwack* of the windshield wiper was real. . . .

The doorman came down the steps of the clubhouse, followed by the bantam boss of Barzac Canneries. Eugene Evans's bald head seemed to reflect his glistening shirt front. Gilmore got out of his car, but he left his engine running. In his present state of mind, it seemed indecent to shut it off. The purr of the idling motor, the metronome beat of the windshield wiper, were part of his driving sense of urgency. . . .

"Well, Gilmore, what's the trouble?" Evans asked.

"She's dead, Mr. Evans," Gilmore blurted.

"What? Who's dead?"

"Peggy. She died half an hour ago. Peggy Bayliss."

"Oh yes, Miss Bayliss. That's our Home Economist. I heard she'd been taken ill today. Too bad."

"What are you going to do about it, Mr. Evans?" Gilmore was surprised by the strident inflection of his own voice.

"Do? Why, we'll take care of the funeral, of course, if the girl has no family. She's been with us for some years, hasn't she? You'll arrange for the flowers, won't you, Gilmore? Don't spare the expense."

Evans pivoted to place one foot on the bottom step, as though he considered the interview at an end. Gilmore seized his arm.



"I didn't come here to discuss flowers, Mr. Evans," he said. "You know that."

Mr. Evans sneezed. He produced a silk handkerchief with a flourish like a magician materializing a bouquet out of thin air. He patted his little mustache and sneezed again. Then he said:

"Look here, Gilmore, I'm catching pneumonia out here. Let's talk about this in the morning."

"It can't wait till morning."

"Why not?"

"Because this morning Peggy Bayliss ate half a can of our field rations. Because tonight Peggy is dead."

Mr. Evans, who was about to furl his silk handkerchief with ceremony befitting the national ensign at sundown, paused to stare at Gilmore with strange, startled eyes.

"Because," Gilmore continued, "when the Army hears about this——"

"I see your point, Gilmore." Evans interrupted with a sudden, final flourish of his handkerchief. "I'll get my hat and coat."

As soon as Gilmore's car was rolling away from the lights of the Country Club, Evans said: "Peggy was a close friend of yours, wasn't she, Gilmore? You're upset."

Gilmore swung his car from the driveway to the highway with a savage twist of the wheel. "If I were in your shoes, Mr. Evans," he said, "I wouldn't be just upset. I'd be in a blue swivet, I'd be sweating ice water."

"I don't understand, Gilmore."

"Until I knew whether or not Peggy Bayliss was poisoned."

"That seems unlikely. Why would anyone poison Peggy? Besides, she's been suffering from digestive disorders for a year—the occupational disease of the home economist, I suppose. The doctor says she probably had a perforated ulcer."

Gilmore thought: *So he has been worrying! He's been asking questions. He knows that the death certificate reads, "Perforated viscus."*

"What doctor, Mr. Evans?" he asked.

"Why, the plant physician. When I heard she'd been taken to the hospital, I sent our man over to see if he could do anything."

"Like signing the death certificate, Mr. Evans—so there would be no investigation?"

"See here, Gilmore, are you trying to stir up trouble?"

*Stir up trouble?* Gilmore thought. *We've got trouble right now.* "I was just wondering," he said, "what I'm supposed to tell the press if the boys come around to accuse us of sending poisoned or tainted rations to the Army?"

"There's no evidence that the rations are poisoned," Evans insisted. "Just because one girl dies is no reason—"

"Then let's get the evidence that the rations are *not* poisoned," Gilmore said. "Let's call back the carload that's rolling toward the Pacific Coast."

"Two carloads." Evans sighed. "How would I explain the delay to the Army? What will G-4 think?"

Gilmore thought, *This isn't a case for G-4 any longer. It's a case for G-2 now. A carload of poisoned rations could do more damage to a division in the field than a hundred jet planes.* He said: "Hasn't it occurred to you, Mr. Evans, that those rations may have been deliberately and maliciously poisoned as an act of war?"

"No," said Mr. Evans, "it hasn't."

"Why don't you call in the F.B.I., Mr. Evans?"

The general manager of the Barzac Soup Company seemed to be having a seizure of some kind. He exhaled loudly, his body stiffened, he had trouble in turning to face Gilmore as he said in a strained voice: "Good Lord, Gilmore! Be reasonable. Do you want to wreck the firm completely? Ever since the change-over, Barzac stock has been pretty shaky. And if the Army ever canceled our contract, the scandal would knock the pins right out from under us. The big stockholders would all unload and—"

"And you'd rather risk poisoning a thousand G.I.'s on some battlefield—and have your scandal then?"

"No, of course not, Gilmore. But I should be hearing from

the F.B.I. any moment now. I wrote them about another matter not long ago. . . .”

“Yes, I know. Chris Froley. It may all tie up. But why wait? Why not demonstrate that we’ve taken all precautions? Let’s impound every ounce of rations that ever left the can line. Let’s have it analyzed, batch by batch. Let’s have poor Peggy autopsied. Let’s be sure, one way or the other.”

“Well, possibly—if it could be done discreetly,” Evans said. “I’ll think about it overnight.”

“You’ll have to act now, Mr. Evans. Peggy’s ex-husband came down from Chicago tonight. He was at the hospital when she died. Once he claims the body, things will be a lot tougher to do quietly.”

“What do you suggest, Gilmore?”

“I’ve already got Bayliss to sign a permission for a post-mortem, and I have it in my pocket. There’s a damned fine pathologist at Pasteur Hospital, a swell guy who also happens to be a brilliant scientist. His name is Dan Coffee, and I suggest you get him on the job at once—if he’ll take it.”

“Isn’t it rather an unusual hour to discuss a matter like this with a perfect stranger?”

“Let’s find out right now, Mr. Evans,” Gilmore said. He pulled up at the curb and shut off his motor. “Here’s where Dr. Coffee lives.”

## VI

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist for Pasteur Hospital, sat propped up in bed, reading Manson's *Tropical Diseases*. The blankets were thrown back, and the sheet made a tent over his angular knees directly opposite his jutting chin. He had just returned from dinner and bridge at the house of a surgeon whose wife had been trying desperately, by social means, to influence the pathologist to cease and desist from the criticism of her husband's handiwork, which she had been told Dr. Coffee was not loath to make at staff meetings at Pasteur. Unfortunately, the surgeon's wife was neither a good cook nor a good bridge player, so it was unlikely that Dr. Coffee's opinion of the surgeon as a better businessman than a self-appointed diagnostician would be altered. Dr. Coffee loved good food and the sound, scientific practice of medicine. He detested mercenary physicians, surgeons, and bridge players.

"I was right, Julia," he said to his wife, who was sitting in front of her dressing table, doing things to her mahogany-red hair. "Dr. Potter was cockeyed, as I suspected. I was right."

"You were wrong, Dan," said Mrs. Coffee, speaking around a mouthful of bobby-pins. "You shouldn't have passed that Blackwood four no-trump."

"The hell with Blackwood," Dan Coffee said. "Potter was boasting about this strange new oriental disease he'd discovered in a G.I. just back from the Far East—something with a Japanese name—*Odan-eki*. From the jaundice and other symptoms I told him I'd bet it was the same as Weil's disease. And it is. It's caused by a spirochete."

"You know, Dan," said Julia Coffee, rubbing cream into the little folds under the corners of her jaw, "sometimes I think

you should take up Canasta. You won't have a friend left if you keep on passing a forcing two-bid while dreaming about micro-organisms."

"I'll phone Potter in the morning and ask him to send me a blood sample. I'll bet him a bottle of V.S.O.P. brandy that a dark-field microscope will show *Leptospirae* in the serum."

"Dan," his wife began, "if I were you—" The ringing of the doorbell interrupted her advice. "Who can that be at this time of night?" she wondered aloud.

"Probably the Fuller Brush man," Dr. Coffee said. "Let's pretend we're not home."

The bell rang again, long and loudly and with insistence. Julia Coffee wadded a bit of tissue and dropped it into the wastebasket. Then she stepped to the window and peered between shade and frame. She squinted through the rainy darkness at the coupé standing at the curb, then shifted her position so she could see the doorway. Three more long, clanging peals echoed through the house.

"There are two men at the door," she said. "One of them looks familiar, but I don't quite recognize him. The other one seems to be wearing dinner clothes. I guess you'd better go down."

Dr. Coffee closed his book with an impatient snap. He gave his unruly straw-colored hair a cursory combing with his long, slender fingers. Then he groaned, got up, and put on his dark blue dressing gown.

The doorbell rang again four times while he was on his way downstairs. He opened the door a few inches with a curt, "Yes. What is it?"

"Sorry, Doctor, but we've got to come in," said the man in the sports jacket, pushing against the door. He was a young man, but his tired smile, sharp rictus folds, and deep apologetic frown made him look old and wise and harried. Dr. Coffee liked his earnest, deep-set eyes and his square determined chin. There was something pleasantly familiar about them.



"I'm Robert Gilmore," said the young man, "of Barzac Canneries."

"Barzac Soup Kitchens," said the gray little man in the dinner jacket, who stood at Gilmore's elbow.

"You probably don't remember me," Gilmore continued, ignoring the interruption, "but we met at the plant just before Louise Barzac sold out her interests. You were called in when Stoneman, the general manager, got himself deceased."

"Of course," said Dr. Coffee. "That was the time that patent attorney tried to frame the paratroop officer who wanted to marry Louise. . . ."

"He married her," Gilmore said, "but he refused to marry the cannery. Doctor, this is Mr. Eugene Evans, the *present* general manager at Barzac."

Dr. Coffee nodded his acknowledgment of the introduction. Then he opened the door wide. "Come in," he said.

"Good of you to let us disturb you at this hour," Evans said. "But we may be in trouble."

"Personally?" asked Dr. Coffee. "Or the cannery—again?"

"Well, we don't know exactly," Evans said. "We thought you might be able—"

"One of our people died at Pasteur Hospital tonight," Gilmore broke in. "I think she was poisoned. Mr. Evans doesn't. But he's agreed to engage you to find out. Will you take the case?"

Dr. Coffee snapped on the lights in the living room. "Sit down," he said, "and tell me more."

Gilmore recited the details of Peggy Bayliss's illness following the eating of the field rations. At Dr. Coffee's request, he described the symptoms as best he could.

"You say the light hurt her eyes," the pathologist said. "Did she find it difficult to keep her eyes open? Did the eyelids droop?"

"I couldn't say."

"Was there any paralysis or constriction of the throat muscles? Did she have difficulty in swallowing?"

"She complained of a sore throat," Gilmore said. "She also said her legs hurt. She had cramps in the calves of both legs."

"That may be indicative." Dr. Coffee frowned thoughtfully. "Unfortunately, it is indicative of a number of things."

"How long will it take you to find out the truth, Doctor?" Mr. Evans asked.

"That depends entirely on what killed Miss Bayliss. We'll make cultures, of course, and some of them may have to incubate for three weeks before we can inject guinea pigs."

"Three weeks!"

"On the other hand, the gross autopsy may give us a pretty clear picture. There may be characteristic lesions. For instance, we usually find tiny, scattered hemorrhages at the base of the brain and in the cord in cases of botulism."

"Botulism?" Mr. Evans was shocked. "I'll guarantee she didn't die of botulism."

"It's true that death from botulism doesn't usually occur quite so rapidly," the pathologist admitted. "Still, in an atypical case——"

"I'll guarantee that you can't find a *Bacillus botulinus* in any food produced by Barzac—or any other reputable cannery in America."

"You see, Doctor," said Gilmore, quoting from a pamphlet he had written when the delegates to the State Medical Society convention had visited the Barzac plant, "we know there are twenty-odd types of spores that survive the heat of ordinary pasteurization. That's why our products undergo extra sterilization by super-heated steam at twenty degrees above the boiling point. So——"

"I understand that, Gilmore," Dr. Coffee interrupted. "But we must always consider the possibility of carelessness—or even of sabotage, since the food was intended for the Army. Suppose the heat was deliberately lowered below the safety point?"

"Exactly!" Gilmore beamed. "That's why I was so anxious to get you on this case, Doctor. Will you take it?"

Dr. Coffee crossed his long legs and tugged pensively at the

lobe of his right ear. "Why, yes," he said at last, "I'll take the case on two conditions. First, in addition to my own fee, you'll pay Pasteur Hospital whatever laboratory charges are necessary, and they may be considerable. I say this because I know you have your own lab over at Barzac, and I insist on having all tests and analyses under my own direct supervision. And second, that if my findings are positive, there will be no hesitation about calling in the police."

"Now wait a minute, Doctor," Mr. Evans protested. "The reason we've come to you is that we don't want the police in on this. There's a strong possibility that there's nothing sinister in this case at all. After all, Miss Bayliss did have occasional digestive disorders. The doctor who signed the death certificate said she had acute gastritis and probably died of a perforated something-or-other."

"Perforated viscus?" Dr. Coffee supplied the word. "The autopsy will show that, of course."

"Of course. That's why we want you—not the police."

"In that case, you'll pardon me if I go back to bed," the pathologist said, getting up. "You have a death certificate, so there'll be no trouble. I thought you wanted the truth. Good-night, gentlemen."

"Don't misunderstand me, Doctor," Mr. Evans seized Dr. Coffee's arm. "Of course we want the truth. But we don't want to wreck the Barzac Soup Kitchens, do we?"

"Mr. Evans," the pathologist said earnestly, "nobody in Northbank wishes Barzac bad luck. You have a payroll of several thousand families. That means a lot to Northbank, and anybody with any civic sense—and that includes the police force—will go out of his way to protect you against malicious gossip and unfounded rumors. I think I can promise you that any official investigation will be conducted with discretion. But if you are going to try to cover up a possible case of sabotage against our armed forces—well, I'm only sorry you consulted me professionally. I'm going to have an awful tough debate between ethics and conscience."

Mr. Evans seemed to be having an equally tough debate going on inside him. He was grayer than ever, his face was beaded with perspiration, and he appeared about to go into his sneezing routine. While his right hand whisked his silk handkerchief across his brow, his left seemed to be fumbling for his trusted inhaler.

Gilmore deemed that the time had come for intervention.

"Doctor, there's no question about Mr. Evans trying to cover up if the case involves justice or national security," he said. "When we came here tonight, he was decided to ask you to take the case—without strings. Right, Mr. Evans?"

"Naturally," said Mr. Evans. "Will you help, Doctor?"

"I'll be at the hospital at seven in the morning for the autopsy," Dr. Coffee said. "I'll want several cans of that suspected food at the same time. I'll phone you as soon as I have anything to report."

Gilmore drove Mr. Evans back to the Country Club in complete mutual silence. As he got out under the porte-cochère, Mr. Evans said: "Thanks for bringing this to my attention, Gilmore. You are quite right. It's terribly important. And I know I can count on your discretion. Goodnight."

"You don't have to worry about me, Mr. Evans. Goodnight."

As he turned his car around, Gilmore saw several people coming down the steps of the club. Out of the corner of his eye, he recognized Bart Remington, the model of an *Esquire* fashion plate, talking to Mr. Evans. He was not quite as sure of the identity of the woman in evening dress standing right behind Remington, but he was reasonably certain it was Barbara Wall.

Gilmore did not go home directly. He drove around for half an hour for no particular reason except that he wanted to think, and he thought well behind the wheel of a car, going nowhere.

When he finally rolled into his own driveway, he was puzzled to note that the garage doors were closed. He always left them

open when he went to work in the morning. He set his emergency brake and started to get out to open the doors. Then he changed his mind. He was probably over-jittery, he told himself, but there was no good reason for him to walk boldly into the glare of his own headlights.

He snapped off his lights. He opened his glove compartment and fumbled inside for several seconds. He had not carried a gun in his glove compartment since his return to Northbank, but just in case the fact was not generally known, he closed the compartment with a loud clang. Then, cautiously, he got out of the car.

He had taken only three steps when a stone wall moved out of the darkness to collide with him. The sheet lightning was very bright, a passing express train roared in his ears, and the ground trembled. He reached out, grabbed a handful of fabric that might have been a sleeve or a coat-tail. Then his knees buckled and he let go.

The soft, moist ground rose up to meet him, and he steadied himself with one knee and both hands. He felt a rush of air as his assailant tore from his grasp, but he was too busy keeping the ground from hitting him in the face to do anything else. He got up on the count of six without having blacked out, and felt rather proud of himself. He found he could walk fairly straight and went as far as the sidewalk to reconnoiter. There was no one in sight.

He put up his car and entered the house with unsteady steps.

The door to his mother's room was open and the light was burning. He put his head in and said: "Victoria, have you given up sleeping entirely?"

"Your women!" his mother said. "They've been calling up again. Twice. Just a little while ago."

"I'll have the phone disconnected," Gilmore said. "They can't do this to you, Victoria."

"A man called up, too," Mrs. Gilmore said. "He didn't leave his name, but he left a message. He said to remind you that curiosity killed a cat."



"If he calls back," Gilmore said, "you can tell him that tom-cats have nine lives."

"He mentioned that, too. He said to tell you it wasn't so."

"I apologize for my friends, Victoria. They're all cards. Anything for a gag."

"You were staggering a little when you came in, Bob. Are you tight?"

"I had a few drinks," Gilmore lied. He walked to the blind woman's bedside. "Goodnight, Victoria," he said.

His mother groped for his hand, and kissed it. "You smell of camphor," she said. "Did you hurt yourself?"

"It's the drinks," Gilmore said. "Formosa cocktails. Everybody's drinking them these days. One part vodka, one part saké, one part Chinese rice brandy, and one part Formosan camphor. It has more kick than a Senate investigation."

"Your father used to say that most of the world's camphor came from Formosa, but I don't remember he ever put it into cocktails."

"Father was a wise man. They're awful."

"Goodnight, son."

When Gilmore opened the door of his own room, he swore aloud. A cyclone seemed to have dropped in during his absence. His books had been pulled from the shelves, the drawers emptied, the bed torn apart, the closet door open and his clothes on the floor. The curtain flapped at the open window.

Was this the explanation of Bayliss's delay in getting to the hospital? At any rate, the intruder had not found *Émile*. The book, as far as Gilmore knew, was still in Barbara Wall's unknowing custody. . . .

Gilmore restored a semblance of order to his room, untangled his blankets and sheets, and went to bed. He got up several times to put ice on the burning lump that was swelling to alarming proportions under his left eye. He did not sleep much.

## VII

At seven o'clock next morning Dr. Coffee walked into his laboratory in the surgical wing of Pasteur Hospital, took off his coat, and slipped into a white jacket.

"Hello, Doris," he said to the slim, dark-haired girl sitting on a stool at the microtome, shaving paper-thin sections from a paraffin block. "What brings you in so early?"

"Dr. Andrews phoned last night after you'd gone home to say he had a mastectomy in B-6 this morning at eight. He wanted to know if you'd be on hand for a frozen section," said Doris Hudson, the pathologist's chief technician. "I told him you were usually here by eight-thirty. Then I heard you had a P.M. this morning, so I thought I'd better come in early in case you needed me."

"Good girl, Doris. Have you got the protocol on the autopsy?"

Doris handed the pathologist a sheaf of multi-colored papers. "Margaret Bayliss," she said. "Dr. Mookerji is already downstairs. He took down the jars and things."

"I'll be back before Dr. Andrews needs me," Dr. Coffee said.

He rode the elevator to the basement and walked along the corridor to the little white-tiled, brightly lighted room where the lonely dead lay patiently on stainless-steel tables, waiting in naked humility to give up their secrets for science or for justice.

Dr. Motilal Mookerji, Pasteur's resident in pathology, was busily making preparations for the necropsy. Dr. Mookerji was a round, brown Hindu the top of whose pink turban barely reached Dan Coffee's shoulders. He had originally come to Northbank on a scholarship from Calcutta Medical School. The scholarship had since expired, but the Hindu pathologist

had stayed on at Pasteur at the meagre stipend of a resident because he felt he still had much to learn from the laboratory of Dr. Coffee, from American hospital procedure, and from America, period. He was in a continuous stew over the American language, which he seasoned with a highly spiced *chichi* accent and amazing sprigs of Anglo-Indian circumlocution.

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib. Five times greetings," said Dr. Mookerji, as he set out the instruments of impersonal dissection. "What are you prognosticating as cause of decease to be presently revealed?"

"The death certificate says 'Probable ruptured viscus,'" Dr. Coffee said.

"And you are in agreement with same?"

"Dr. Mookerji, 'autopsy' means literally 'seeing with one's own eyes.' Shall we be literal?"

The Hindu wagged his big head twice to the left. "Quite, Doctor Sahib," he said.

Dr. Coffee stretched out his hand for the instruments.

At seven forty-five o'clock Robert Gilmore stepped into the elevator in the lobby of the Main Building of the Barzac plant.

"You're early this morning, Mr. Gilmore," the operator said. "I never seen you here before eight-thirty, even in tomato time."

"It's too hot to sleep," Gilmore said.

The car hardened into swift ascent, then melted to a stop.

"Eighth floor, Mr. Gilmore. Ain't you gettin' off?"

"Take me up to the tower floor, Joe."

Gilmore walked to the door of Peggy Bayliss's office and stopped. The Home Economics Department would be empty at this hour, he knew. The two buxom white-haired matrons who translated Peggy's recipes into crusts and casseroles and quivering aspics were not due for another hour. The door was open, yet some intangible bar kept him from crossing the threshold. He shook his head, as though reproving himself for being a silly sentimentalist, then strode boldly to Peggy's desk.

He lowered himself into the chair, gently, because he felt he was displacing a spectre. Peggy's vivid personality was still all over the place. The letter she had written the day before to the Kansas City food editor lay on her desk, unsigned. The pen with which she would have signed it now stood useless forever in the onyx desk set. Nobody else would entrust an official signature to purple ink, or keep another pen filled with green ink for inter-office memos. The recipe files which she had been consulting were spread fanwise beside the letter, with the colored tabs on each card to indicate whether or not the recipe was exclusive and for how long. A single rose lifted a tired head from a crystal tube, its crimson petals wide in full-blown protest against the heat of summer. The desk calendar pad said: "Check Belgian ale soup recipes for *Brewer's Journal*. . . . Try building mulligatawny around Barz. chicken soup for Joe D., doing East Indian food piece for *Collier's*. . . . Dinner with Gil?" Why had she put a question mark after the last entry? Gilmore leafed through a few other pages of appointments which would never be kept. He pulled open a desk drawer, poignant with intimate trivia—a powder-smudged mirror, tissues, a comb, aspirin tablets, soda mints, nail polish, and a crumpled handkerchief that emanated a faint musky fragrance that was Peggy's aura. Gilmore pushed the drawer shut with a bang, as though to close his mind to the poignancy of the perfume.

The brusque movement jarred the desk, and the full-blown rose disintegrated completely, flinging down its crimson petals with the suddenness of death.

Gilmore sprang up, moved quickly to the corner of the room to throw open the two windows, to let in the breath of summer, the smells of morning, the scent of the living. He filled his lungs with the warmth of the city, tempered by the breeze from the river. It was a steamy warmth, redolent with the clean, pungent aroma of tomatoes. They were there before him, the tomatoes—millions of them. As far as he could see, the two roads approaching the Barzac plant from the north were

clogged with farmers' trucks, piled high with scarlet fruit, great sluggish red streams that crawled for miles toward the grading platforms, the conveyor belts, the hungry soup kettles. The Interstate Bridge across the river was also scarlet with tomato trucks, stalled bumper to bumper, waiting their turn to unload. And tomato-laden barges were nudging the landing stages on the riverfront just below the plant. To the production people, it would be another fifty thousand tons of love-apples to be sorted, cleaned, pulped, strained, seasoned and cooked. To Gilmore, the gleam of ripe color and the fresh, earthy tang of the harvest, cool on the shimmering heat of morning, were a recall to the present, to reality, and to duty. He was still working for Barzac and the trickiest job of his public relations career lay just ahead.

"Gil!" said a voice behind him. "I knew I'd find you here."

"Hello, Barbara," Gilmore said, without turning around. "Fall out of bed?"

"Gil, I've heard the news. I phoned the hospital last night and they told me about Peggy. I was shocked. It's dreadful."

"Isn't it?" Gilmore said. He turned around at last. Barbara was as cool and crisp and radiant as usual. He knew she would be, even though he could not know that her crispness would be in pale blue linen this morning. Every strand of her honey-colored hair was in place and every dimple freshly powdered. Her amber eyes, all of her, radiated youth and life and energy. It was positively indecent for anyone to look, let alone feel, quite so alive and perfect. He knew that he, for instance, probably looked as though he'd slept in his clothes which was not true, because he hadn't slept more than an hour all told. It showed, too, because a look of concern crept into Barbara's face. Barbara herself immediately cleared up the source of concern.

"Good lord, Gil, what happened to your eye?"

"I ran into a boor in the dark," Gilmore said. He had rehearsed the line for several hours during the night.

"Were you out with the Carrot Queen again?"



"No, of course not."

"Did you meet Chris Froley?"

"Not that I know of."

"You shouldn't be up here," Barbara said. "You shouldn't stay in this office. It's not good for you."

"I've got to stay here until it's finished," Gilmore said.

"Until what's finished, Gil?"

"Over at the hospital. They're taking Peggy apart to find out what happened."

"I'm sorry, Gil. I know how you must feel. I heard you talked Mr. Evans into it. Why didn't you call me?"

"What for? This isn't promotion. This is counter-promotion. Suppression, in a way. Public relations. It's my job."

"I tried to call you last night. You weren't home."

"I know. I got home late. Who told you about all this?"

"Mr. Evans," Barbara said.

"Of course. You were at the Country Club—with Remington. I thought Evans wanted to keep everything top secret."

"Not from me, surely. And certainly not from Bart Remington."

"That's right. You were the one who thought up the idea of having Peggy glamorize the rations. By the way, does Remington think Peggy was poisoned?"

"Poisoned? But Mr. Evans didn't say—"

Barbara was interrupted by the appearance in the doorway of the pink-and-white countenance of Pierre Lenormand. The master chef's Development Kitchens shared the tower floor with the Home Economics Kitchens. His headquarters, just across the hall from the domain of the late Peggy Bayliss, were manned not by buxom matrons but by lean, grizzled French professional cooks, whose duty was not to invent new uses for Barzac soups, but to create new soups or to improve the old ones.

"Good morning, good people." A half inch of handmade cigarette adhered to the chef's lower lip as he spoke. "I have heard the bad news. I offer you my condolences, Gilmore."

"Not to me, Chef," Gilmore said. "To the Barzac Soup Company. Barzac is going to miss Peggy."

"You are right," Lenormand nodded. He plucked the diminishing end of his cigarette from between his lips, risked burning his fingers to examine it, decided its possibilities were exhausted, and flicked it through the open window. "I agree completely. Mademoiselle Peggy did not invent *saloperies* which nobody ever tasted. She did not write recipes for the printer only; she invented for the dinner table. She did not believe that oranges or pears should be served with mayonnaise and chopped nuts and whipped cream and sardine tails." The chef produced a tobacco pouch and a book of cigarette papers. With his thumb and two yellowed fingers he made a trough of the brown paper and poured tobacco into it. His tongue moistened the edge of the paper. His right hand rolled and twisted the ends of the cigarette while his left replaced his pouch. "She was a professional," he continued. "She was a real confrère. She believed in the basic culinary truths discovered by the Old Masters. She believed in the dignity of the human palate. I salute her memory." Lenormand's left hand had re-emerged from his pocket, hauling forth a briquet which he disentangled from its long tail of yellow tinder-rope. He worried the ratchet wheel and blew on the tinder-rope end until it glowed. He looked at Gilmore as he drew deeply on his fresh cigarette. "She was also very lovely," he added. "Who gave you the black eye, Gilmore?"

"Nobody. It's psychosomatic," Gilmore said. "Peggy's going to be hard to replace."

"I was thinking this morning while I was watering my chervil before the sun got too hot," Lenormand said, regarding his cigarette critically, "that perhaps my daughter Yvette would be a likely candidate. She was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth, but you might say she was born with an iron skillet in one hand and a copper saucepan in the other. She was born in the tradition. She is very young, true. She has just only finished college last spring. And she is now in France, making a visit to her aged grandparents, so I do not know even if she

would be interested in such a thing. Of course, if my poor wife were still alive she would throw up her hands in horror. She had always intended that Yvette should go back to France with us when I retire. I am to be pensioned in two years, you know. Some time ago I bought a small *mas* in the south of France—a small little house with a few olives, a few grapes for wine, and a few orange trees—a hillside looking out over the Mediterranean, and a place to raise a few ducks and rabbits. My poor wife thought that Yvette should go back with us and marry a Frenchman. But Yvette, I think, is more American than French. I am afraid she may prefer Barzac-in-Northbank to Tourette-sur-Loup. I think—”

The telephone rang. Gilmore let it ring three times before he picked it up. He was on the point of replying “Miss Bayliss’s office.” But he merely said, “Yes?”

Then he said, “No . . . No. . . . Have you tried him at home? . . . Just a moment.” He turned to Barbara. “The operator is trying to locate Mr. Evans,” he said. “She can’t find him. And neither Quirk or Remington have come in yet.”

“Mr. Evans had to leave town unexpectedly,” Barbara said.

“Good God!” Gilmore said. “Why—today of all days?”

“It was important, I guess,” Barbara said. “He took the six-thirty plane for Chicago this morning.”

So that’s why you’re up so early, Gilmore thought. You probably took him to the airport.

“Who’s calling Mr. Evans?” Gilmore asked the phone. “Dr. Coffee? Put him on, please.”

At eight-fifteen Dr. Coffee and his Hindu resident returned to the surgical floor carrying two Mason jars each. As they entered the pathology laboratory, Doris Hudson said:

“A messenger just came in with six cans of something from the Barzac Soup Company. What do you want done with them, Doctor?”

“Number the cans,” the pathologist said, “and send a sample from each to bacteriology. They’ll want to make a saline emul-

sion, to be heated for an hour at sixty degrees Centigrade. I'll see about the incubation later."

"What are we looking for, Doctor?"

"Frankly, I don't know. There didn't seem to be any characteristic lesions of botulism, but we've got to be sure. Meanwhile I want you to set up a Reinsch test on samples from each of those cans. And be sure to run controls on the acid and distilled water. Have we got enough copper foil?"

"I think so. But we may run out of Bunsen burners if you've got many more tests to run?"

"Then dig up some more somewhere," Dr. Coffee said. "Dr. Mookerji and I are going to run some Reinsch tests of our own. You're familiar with the technique of the Reinsch test, aren't you, Doctor?"

"Quite," said Dr. Mookerji, with a lateral jerk of his pink turban. "Same consists in simmering tissue gently in acidulated solution containing one-sixth hydrochloric acid by volume. Sur-reptitious presence of certain nefarious and toxic substances will be revealed by addition of smallish snippet of thin copper in purest metallic state."

The phone rang and Doris Hudson answered.

"Exactly," Dr. Coffee said. "Will you prepare the tissue, Doctor? I suggest a specimen of liver and one of the stomach wall."

"Dr. Andrews is ready in B-6," Doris Hudson announced. "He thinks you may want to look at the patient before you do the biopsy."

"Tell him I'll be right in," the pathologist said.

For the next half hour Dr. Coffee relegated the Peggy Bayliss case to the back of his mind. His laboratory, however, carried on with a vengeance. Dr. Mookerji hustled about in a flurry of filter papers, bottles, beakers and Bunsen burners. Doris Hudson calmly opened cans, polished copper foil and lighted the blue gas-flames. By the time Dr. Coffee was loosing Arctic blasts of liquid carbon dioxide against his freezing microtome, a dozen beakers were bubbling with mysterious and ominous insistence on the other side of the lab. The pathologist shaved

sections from the frozen tissue he had brought from the operating room, thawed them in a pan of water, stained them, slid them onto tiny glass rectangles and under the nose of his microscope. It took him only half a minute to recognize the swollen, misshapen cells of cancer. He returned to the operating room with the bad news.

"Am of opinion," said Dr. Mookerji, peering into one of the bubbling beakers, "that experimental testings are on verge of completion."

"Don't touch anything," Doris Hudson cautioned. "The doctor likes to check his own conclusions. He'll be right back."

"Am sincerely hopeful that Reinsch tests will counteract sadness of biopsy," the Hindu said. "Doctor Sahib is frequently somewhat melancholy when microscope reveals carcinoma."

"Here he is," Doris said. "We're ready, Doctor."

Dr. Coffee first examined the blank tests—the beakers which contained only the acid and distilled water. With a glass rod he removed the strips of copper foil. They were clean and bright. He next removed the strips from the beakers in which the stomach and liver tissue had been placed. The copper was coated with a steel-gray deposit.

"Most informative," Dr. Mookerji commented. "Inasmuch as coating of copper is not of silvery brightness, mercury can be forthwith eliminated as fatal causative agent."

"We still have to distinguish between antimony, bismuth, and arsenic," Dr. Coffee said. "Will you heat one of those strips in a test tube, Doctor, so we can make a microscopic search for arsenous oxide crystals?"

"Instantly," said the Hindu resident. "Am familiar with octagonal outlines of same."

"Doris, I want to talk to Mr. Eugene Evans at the Barzac Soup Company," Dr. Coffee said. "And put in a call for Lieutenant Max Ritter at the police station."

"I haven't been able to raise Mr. Evans," Doris Hudson reported a moment later, "but here's Lieutenant Ritter."

"Hello, Max," the pathologist said. "Haven't seen you in



weeks. How's business at the detective bureau? . . . Well, I may be able to throw a little something your way. It's somewhat tenuous and highly confidential at this point, but— Can you come up to the shop? . . . Okay, Max. Right away."

"They can't seem to locate Mr. Evans," Doris said. "Will you talk to a Mr. Gilmore?"

"I sure will. Put him on. . . . Mr. Gilmore, this is Dan Coffee. . . . Well, yes, I have news of a sort, but I'd rather not talk over the phone. I'll be over to see you in half an hour—with Lieutenant of Detectives Max Ritter of the Northbank police."

## VIII

At nine o'clock the big wheels of the Barzac Soup Company were idling quietly in the air-conditioned office of Mr. Calvin Quirk, the No. 2 wheel. In the absence of Mr. Evans, the No. 1 wheel, the asthenic, lipless, tallow-complexioned assistant general manager had called a council of war. Bart Remington had already arrived when Pierre Lenormand entered, followed by Gilmore and Barbara Wall. Remington immediately took Gilmore aside and whispered:

"Where'd you get the beautiful shiner? Run into something in the dark?"

Gilmore nodded.

"A door, I suppose."

"No. A boor."

Remington chuckled. "Chris Froley?"

"I don't know. It was dark. What makes you think it was Froley?"

"Talk gets around," the production manager said. "Your private life is your own business, of course, but I do think you'd be wise to watch your step with the Froley dame. Her husband is almost as tough as he talks. So— Well, you understand, don't you?"

"Don't worry. I'll keep the spotless reputation of Barzac free from the breath of scandal."

Mr. Quirk rustled his papers and cleared his throat noisily to call the meeting to order.

"Mr. Evans has unfortunately been called out of town," said Mr. Quirk, in a voice that was somewhere between the B-flat clarinet and the mating call of the loon. "Before he left he asked me to call you all together in connection with the unfortunate death last night of our colleague, Peggy Bayliss. You were all

present at yesterday morning's tasting session, at which Miss Bayliss rather ostentatiously sampled our new product for the Army. Mr. Evans asked me to say that all details of this session must be stricken from your memories. If any mention appears in the public prints of the fact that the death of Miss Bayliss followed her consumption of Barzac's field rations for the Army, heads will roll. Mr. Evans says he will be fair. He will make every effort to determine the individual responsible for any possible leak of such information to the press. But if such a leak occurs, and he is unable to place the responsibility exactly, he will summarily dismiss everyone who had access to the information—and that means every person in this room."

Bart Remington whistled softly. "My gosh!" he said, nervously verifying the ends of his maroon bow tie. "Does that mean Peggy was poisoned by that G.I. ambrosia she ate yesterday?"

"Not at all," Quirk said quickly. "It merely means that we are to avoid giving false currency to any similar surmise—we are to prevent any such rumors gaining credence. We are——"

"Quirk, let's be frank," Gilmore interrupted. "We're all adults, and we're all sworn to secrecy as of this moment. Of course there's a suspicion that Peggy was poisoned. And we'll know definitely one way or the other in a very few minutes. Dr. Coffee is on his way here from Pasteur Hospital, and he'll be able to tell us. He's done a post-mortem on Peggy this morning."

"But—he's coming here—to this office?"

"Certainly. He phoned me he was on his way so I left word that I'd be in your office, Quirk."

"But why did he phone *you*, Gilmore? Why not me?"

"Because I was with Mr. Evans last night when he engaged Dr. Coffee. So naturally, Quirk, when Evans buzzed off without even saying good-bye, Dr. Coffee talked to me. Didn't Mr. Evans tell you about this?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, he did mention it, but——"

"Hasn't he taken steps to recall the two carloads of rations that have already been shipped?"

"Well—as a matter of fact, that's why he went to Chicago. He thought it would be more discreet and more efficient to go directly to the railway people there and try to locate the cars, rather than work through the railway agents here in Northbank. He has friends in the main office who——"

"Didn't he give you instructions to hold up all further shipments of Army rations? Haven't you impounded every can we now have in our warehouses?"

"Gilmore, I have no accounting to give to you."

"No, of course not. But I'm the guy that's going to have to talk to the reporters if they come swarming around the plant to find out if we're poisoning the U.S. Army."

"You'll have to accept my word that Mr. Evans has taken all necessary precautions."

"My gosh, Quirk," Remington broke in, "come down off the tall stallion. If Peggy was poisoned . . . if somebody's been able to salt our Army rations with cyanide or something . . . My gosh, Quirk, don't you realize what it means to have a murderer and a saboteur at large in the plant?"

Any comment Quirk may have intended was postponed by the arrival of Dr. Coffee and Max Ritter. The pathologist did not introduce the lanky, dark, sad-eyed, curly-haired police detective, but left him standing near the door of Quirk's office while Gilmore did the honors.

"Dr. Coffee, this is Mr. Quirk, our assistant general manager. Mr. Evans is unfortunately out of town."

"Good to know you," Dr. Coffee said, looking at the group on the other side of the desk, rather than at Quirk. "Are you sure you want all these people to hear what I've got to say, Quirk?"

"Mr. Evans left word that everybody who attended yesterday's tasting sessions was to be held strictly responsible for maintaining complete discretion," Quirk said. "You may speak freely, Doctor."

"The only thing I can tell you definitely today," Dr. Coffee said, "is negative. Miss Bayliss did not die of the causes indi-

cated on her death certificate. She definitely did not die of a perforated viscus."

"But you can't tell us what she did die of?" Quirk asked.

"I can tell you what I think," the pathologist said. "On the basis of a presumptive test made this morning, I am practically certain that Miss Bayliss died of arsenic poisoning."

"Arsenic?" Quirk raised an inch from his chair.

"My gosh, Doctor! Are you sure?"

"I'm satisfied myself. As far as the law is concerned, however, I won't be sure until we've done a quantitative Marsh test to establish that Miss Bayliss absorbed at least three grains of arsenic, which is the minimum fatal dose."

"And how long will that take?" Remington asked.

"A week perhaps. Certainly four or five days."

"My gosh, Doctor. Why don't you install some modern machinery down at your hospital?"

"A Marsh test has to be done with extreme care, particularly when a person's life may depend on its outcome. We have to spend several days alone testing the materials, to make sure that the zinc, the sulphuric acid, the calcium chloride, and the rest of the chemicals we use are free of arsenic. Then we have to prepare to weigh black arsenic mirrors deposited on the walls of a glass tube—weights which are computed in milligrams. One milligram is about the sixty-fifth part of a grain and it takes nearly five hundred grains to make an ounce. So when you're dealing in quantities as small as the thirty-thousandth part of an ounce——"

"You deal in these microscopic quantities personally, I take it," said Mr. Quirk.

"I check every step of every operation, yes," said Dr. Coffee.

"Somebody told me you had some kind of foreigner working over there in your lab at Pasteur Hospital," Mr. Quirk pursued.

"My resident pathologist, Dr. Motilal Mookerji, happens to be a Hindu," Dan Coffee's words were icy. "He also happens to be the most able bacteriologist and forensic chemist I have ever met. I have perfect confidence in him and in his work."



"He seems like a nice fellow," Remington said. "I met him at a Lion's Club luncheon. But he does talk funny English."

"He talks more chemistry per cubic centimeter than any rhetorician I know," Dr. Coffee countered. "However, I understand you have your own laboratory here, and if you'd like to send over your own technicians to sit in on the tests, I should be delighted—even though I doubt if they are particularly skilled in toxicology."

"Mr. Evans has perfect confidence in you, Dr. Coffee," said Mr. Quirk. "Please continue."

"That's all I have to say for the moment," the pathologist said, but from the way he said it, Gilmore knew it wasn't true. So when Dan Coffee gave Max Ritter the eye while Quirk was dismissing the rest of the kitchen cabinet, Gilmore lagged behind. So did Barbara Wall.

Dr. Coffee introduced Max Ritter to Quirk, who assumed his noblesse-oblige manner and passed him on to Gilmore and Barbara.

"Mr. Evans assured me," Dr. Coffee said, "that if circumstances warranted, I was to call in the police—discreetly. Lieutenant Ritter is both discreet and of the police. He thinks it may be necessary for him to have free access to all parts of the plant at all times."

"I'm sure that can be arranged," said Mr. Quirk.

"In the meantime, I'd like someone to show me and Lieutenant Ritter through the plant, as though we were just curious visitors. I understand that's often your job, Gilmore."

"Mr. Gilmore and I both are in charge of that sort of thing," Barbara Wall said.

Dr. Coffee favored Barbara with a searching glance that seemed to diagnose both body and soul.

"Before we start," he said to Gilmore, "I wonder if you could steer me to the gentlemen's room."

Once safe within the white-tiled privacy of the gent's room, Dr. Coffee said, "I suppose I'm cockeyed, but there's something about both Quirk and that good-looking girl out there that I

don't trust—yet. That's why I wanted to ask you two questions privately. Six cans of your Army rations were sent to my lab this morning. Who sent them?"

"I don't know for sure," Gilmore said, "but I guess it was Quirk, since he seems to be riding herd in Evans's absence. Why?"

"I'm faced with a very puzzling situation," Dr. Coffee said. "There's no doubt whatever that Miss Bayliss was full of arsenic when she died. But I tested each of the six cans of rations you folks sent over—tested them for arsenic. And every can was negative!"

## IX

Gilmore conducted Dr. Coffee and Max Ritter to the third floor. Barbara Wall was waiting for them as they stepped from the elevator. He knew she would be.

"I'll tag along," she announced. "I may be of some help."

"We're just taking the usual cook's tour," Gilmore said.

A great wave of sound swept through the doors to the third-floor kitchens. Against the din of moving machinery—the whirr of motors, the hum of conveyor belts—there was a counterpoint of rhythmic chords, recurrent themes, and sharp, accented notes: the tinny, treble clatter of empty cans as they cascaded down from an upper floor to the filling lines; the rhythmic stamp of the presses that sealed the cans; the dull, rattling resonance of the filled cans rolling their glistening way to the retort baskets. The human voice was like a feather of spray lost in the sea of noise. Gilmore shouted to be heard: "This is our beef operation . . . all the beef soups . . . bouillon, beef-vegetable, beef-noodle. . . . So we've been cooking the field rations on this floor!"

"Are you cooking them now?" Dr. Coffee shouted back.

Barbara Wall shook her head in the negative. "Not since last night. Mr. Evans had production stopped."

"Dr. Coffee wants to see the whole process," Gilmore yelled. "We'll start over here."

A crew of white-coated men were trimming fat from succulent cuts of beef, tossing the slabs of meat into netting slings. The slings were hoisted to overhead trolleys and swung across the room to a line of gleaming broth kettles. Another sling of beef was being lifted from its steaming kettle to be trolleyed to the trimming tables and the mechanical dicer, trailing a fragrant cloud of vapor.

"Duck!" Gilmore shouted. "Half a ton of meat packs a wallop."

He waved the group further into the vast kitchen. Dozens of women and girls in white caps, blue blouses, and white aprons were bent over hills of diced beef on stainless-steel tables, running through the morsels with deft, patient fingers, seeking out bits of fat, gristle, or bone to be discarded.

More uniformed women—an acre of them—sat around the sorting tables in homey groups, or lined the conveyor belts. They were peeling vegetables by hand, or examining red-gold heaps of cubed carrots, bit by bit, or seeking out imperfect kernels among the pastel mounds of corn or lima beans. They worked against a brilliant background, a mosaic of fresh color: dark green tufts of parsley growing out of full baskets, ivory tubs of peeled potatoes, tons of violet-tinted turnips.

A girl in blue-and-white waved a carrot at Gilmore. He waved back, half-heartedly. That was enough encouragement for Frances Froleay. The Carrot Queen immediately abandoned her court and caught up with Gilmore.

"Thank you for the photos, Mr. Gilmore." She flashed her champion's smile. "Your secretary sent them to me. They're wonderful, don't you think?"

"Superb."

"And your secretary told me about the screening of the film tonight. Will you be there?"

"I'm afraid not," Gilmore said.

"Oh!" It was a disappointed *oh*, with eyes to match. "I was hoping we could go together, so you could tell me how I looked on the screen."

"I'd like to, Mrs. Froleay, but I can't make it tonight."

"You're not afraid of Chris, are you? After the other night, I mean? You don't have to be. He just likes to talk a lot. Don't you pay any attention to him."

Gilmore was suddenly aware that he had an interested audience.

"I'll remember that," he said. "See you later."

He rejoined his group, moved quickly ahead, and pointed through an open door to thousands of pale green globules glistening in a hundred baskets. "The onion-peeling operation is isolated over there," he said.

"I bet those gals cry their eyes out," Max Ritter said.

"Not after the first twenty minutes," Gilmore said.

"No kidding!" Ritter shook his head. "That possible, Doc?"

"The human body is a remarkably resilient organism, Max. Your ears are already accustomed to the steady noise in here. Your eyes would soon adjust themselves to the effluvia of peeled onions. Want to try?"

"Let's get back to the meat," the detective said. "I don't see much future in vegetables. What cooks next?"

"The blending kettles." Gilmore smiled as he pointed to a steel platform, two steps above the concrete floor, on which stood a battery of a dozen great solid-nickel urns, each holding close to a hundred gallons. "This is the culinary heart, the artistic center of the Barzac kitchens."

"This I must see," Dr. Coffee said.

"I'm sorry you can't climb on the platforms," Barbara Wall said.

"How do you mean, can't?" Max Ritter said. "Do we got to crack this thing by absent treatment?"

"I think the lieutenant has a point. . . ."

"We'll have to get special dispensation from Mr. Evans," Gilmore apologized. "In all the time I've been here, I've never been allowed on the platform. But I think you'll get a pretty comprehensive idea of the operation from the floor."

"Let's give a look," Ritter said.

A score of chefs were scurrying about the blending kettles in orderly confusion, weighing ingredients, consulting thermometers, gauges, and stop watches. Open sacks of white flour, salt, sugar, and spices yawned at the base of the platform, stabbed by great metal scoops. A chef's helper went from one barrel to another, swinging a shovel, and peering at the snowy crystals of monosodium glutamate, the bright yellow turmeric, the pale



mauve of ground cloves, the drab green of bay leaves. A pleasant aroma hovered over the operation.

Dr. Coffee was fascinated by the palate-tickling sights, the appetizing smells—all the gustatory overtones to the infernal din. He could almost taste the savory things cooking all around him by the hundred gallons. Dr. Coffee considered himself a better-than-average amateur cook, even though two out of three of his cheese soufflés had never survived the oven with appropriate rigidity for more than two minutes and ten seconds. This was the ideal assignment for a pathologist who ranked *Le Grand Vatel* with *Le Grand Pasteur*—to ply his trade among the fragrant surroundings of his avocation.

Yet Dr. Coffee did not forget his mission. He watched the steaming cauldrons of beef broth being trundled across the floor on stainless-steel three-wheeled carts. When the broth was poured into the mechanical clarifier, he decided the machine was nothing more than a large-scale centrifuge, such as he used in his lab to separate the blood cells from the serum by centrifugal force; only with the consommé, it was the fine particles of solid matter that was being hurled to the outer rim of the machine to be removed mechanically, particles too fine for a sieve. He watched the consommé being drained into mobile vats which foamed like washtubs on Monday morning, although much more aromatically. He watched two men with huge wooden paddles, working over the suds to reduce them to normal consistency before canning. It was the actual canning that he was watching with his professional eye.

He saw the soup being transferred to the tanks above the can line. He saw the empty cans moving mechanically under the spouts, each to receive its measured charge. He saw the filled cans moving mechanically between the two rows of neat, efficient girls who dipped spoons into each can to examine the consistency. If there were too many noodles, the girl removed a spoonful; if not enough, she added some. The cans moved inexorably on their track of steel rollers to the great press that stamped on the caps, sealing them hermetically.

Dr. Coffee watched the sealed cans drop into the waiting retort baskets—huge hemispheres of cast-iron lattice—which were hauled away, seven hundred cans at a time, to be locked into the pressure retorts. Here super-heated steam would maintain for an hour a temperature of 235 degrees Fahrenheit—twenty-three degrees above the boiling point—which would destroy all known ferments. When he had seen one batch of seven hundred cans hoisted from the cloud of steam hissing from the retorts and plunged into cold water to stop further cooking, Dr. Coffee spoke for the first time in twenty minutes.

"I noticed," he shouted into Gilmore's ear, "that the machine which seals the cans stamps a series of figures and letters into the top of each can. A code?"

Gilmore nodded. "The date," he yelled, "the contents, and the particular batch."

Dr. Coffee cupped his hands. "The rations, too?"

Again Gilmore nodded.

"Good," said Dr. Coffee. "Then maybe I can find out why there was no arsenic in the cans that came over to my lab this morning. Maybe we can find out if the death of Peggy Bayliss was an accident or if she was murdered—and by whom. Can you send me a sample of every batch of rations turned out here? One of each." The pathologist held up one finger. "One can. Yes? Or no?"

"Can do," said Gilmore. He grinned at his own bad pun.

## X

Peggy Bayliss was buried next morning. The funeral was simple, but the mourners were impressive, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The floral display was also impressive—particularly to Northbank florists. The Northbank County Hospital and the charity wards of six other Northbank hospitals would benefit later.

When Bob Gilmore could not locate Peggy's ex-husband, whom he had not seen since a few minutes after Peggy's death, he had made the funeral arrangements himself. After all, Mr. Evans had given him that commission, on behalf of Barzac Canneries.

Gilmore knew that Peggy was vaguely theistic, although not particularly religious. He had never known to what church she belonged, if any, and Bayliss was unavailable for counsel. Having once gone with Peggy to a lecture at the Northbank Unitarian Church, Gilmore decided that a Unitarian minister could not offend anyone and would certainly have been acceptable to Peggy, had she been arranging her own funeral.

The fashionable Midtown Mortuary Chapel was crowded. Most of the Barzac big wigs were there—including Eugene Evans, who had returned from his mission to Chicago in time to order a spray of tuberose. A blanket of gardenias covered the casket in the name of the company.

A surprising number of little wigs were there, too. Pierre Lenormand and his staff of cooks had sent a chef's cap of white roses, but just in case the magnitude of the tribute was not understood, every chef not on duty turned up at the funeral parlors. The buxom matrons from Peggy's own kitchens were also there, of course, and a delegation of girls from the third-

floor beef operation and the fourth-floor can line. The third-floor vegetable girls sent a wreath and Frances Froley, who smiled nervously at Gilmore when she came in. Chris Froley was not there; the union had sent a spray, however.

Barbara Wall was there, too. She arrived early. She was sweetly solicitous about Gilmore. She was also as nervous as a terrier on the Fourth of July. Although she kept her hands in the pockets of her jacket, Gilmore could hear the telegraphic click-click of her restless fingernails. He was about to suggest that polish-remover would be quicker, when she volunteered an explanation.

"Gil, I'm in a state," she said. "I almost telephoned you to come over last night."

"Why didn't you?"

"Well, you've been acting so funny since I came to Northbank that I wasn't sure— But I was scared to death. Somebody broke into my apartment last night while I was out."

"Oh?" Gilmore looked around, anxiously seeking George Bayliss. There was no sign of Peggy's ex-husband. "Did they take much?"

"Nothing, as far as I know. But they left the place a mess. It gave me the creeps."

"Did they take any books?" Gilmore felt his scalp prickle.

"They took everything apart, but they didn't take a thing that I've noticed. Anyhow, why would they take . . . ?" She stopped, darted a startled glance at Gilmore. "Gil, did I ever give you back your copy of *Émile*?"

"No. Is it gone?"

"I don't know. I didn't think to look. Oh, Gil! Remember how I used to rib you about Zina and the book? How I said she must be a Red agent since she was a Spanish Loyalist refugee, and how you were just getting yourself married to a subversive network, instead of a Moroccan dancer?"

"I remember."

"Do you suppose it could be true, Gil? I can't wait to get home to see if *Émile* is still there."

"Anything could be true," Gilmore said. He looked behind him again. Dr. Coffee had just come in with Max Ritter. They were taking seats at the back without talking to anyone. Still no Bayliss. "Barbara, do you remember meeting George Bayliss in New York?"

"Peggy's husband? Yes, I remember him."

"Have you seen him around Northbank the last few days?"

"No. Isn't he here?"

"I don't see him," Gilmore shrugged. "I haven't seen him since twenty minutes after Peggy died. I don't know where to reach him, and I haven't heard from him."

"Then there's nobody to sit in the mourners' pew," Barbara said.

"There's me," Gilmore replied.

The white-haired *chef des cuisines* loomed behind Barbara.

"And don't forget Papa Lenormand," said the chef. "That *grande garce* was like a daughter. I mourn her in my heart."

"I want to sit with you, Gil," Barbara said.

Lenormand placed a fatherly hand on Barbara's shoulder.

"You will sit between us," he said.

Gilmore looked uneasily about him, searching the dim, flower-scented hush for George Bayliss. Chris Froley had come in to slip into a seat beside his wife, but Bayliss was still absent. More disquieting than his absence was the sudden presence of three newspaper reporters, standing near the entrance, talking to Mr. Evans. Gilmore recognized them as representatives of all three Northbank dailies. The *Tribune* and the *News* weren't so bad; he could handle the morning papers; they were more or less friendly to the cannery, and there would be time to talk reason to their publishers. The man from the *Journal* was something else again; an afternoon paper had to have an eight-column headline for street sales, and the *Journal* was not particularly friendly to Barzac; the *Journal* was not friendly to anybody; the *Journal* was an anachronistic survival of muck-raking newspaperdom at its yellowest. Gilmore started walking down the aisle.



"Come on," he said. He took Barbara's arm. Lenormand solemnly followed.

As they slid into the front pew, Mr. Evans silently took the seat beside Lenormand.

The ceremony was mercifully brief. The minister's casual, simple dignity was much more touching than any bombastic platitudes of hope-through-tears. As the casket rolled soundlessly up the aisle, with the minister intoning "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. . . ." a gust of spontaneous sorrow rippled through the chapel.

Barbara whispered, "Gil, do we go to the cemetery?"

Gilmore shook his head. "She's going to Chicago. Family plot."

". . . I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Mr. Evans leaned across Lenormand to say: "Gilmore, there are several newspaper reporters back there. Will you speak to them?"

"Sure," Gilmore said. "Did you head off those freight cars, Mr. Evans?"

"Everything is under control," the general manager replied, "except those reporters. I don't like their attitude. You—you'll be careful what you say to them, Gilmore."

A tremor of cold intuition ran through Gilmore. Something must have leaked. The newspaper boys would try to worm the truth out of him, and he didn't feel fit for a verbal sparring match. He had one defense. He could speak frankly because he did not know the truth—not for certain—not yet. He did not have to confide his suspicions. He could stick to facts.

"I'll handle them, Mr. Evans," he said.

He tried to give his voice the ring of self-assurance. Actually he felt about as self-assured as the understudy for a lion tamer on the trainer's day off.

The chapel emptied quickly. The three reporters pushed through the stragglers like watch dogs eager to sniff at some intruder. They were definitely canine, these news hounds. The

*Tribune* man was a mastiff, the *News* man as vain and well-groomed as a chow, the *Journal* reporter a yapping terrier.

Mr. Evans smilingly took his leave, waving the reporters on to Gilmore. As they closed in, Barbara stayed behind.

"Howdy, gents," Gilmore said. "What can I do for you?"

"What's the story?" growled the *Tribune* man. "Evans says you can give us an angle."

"The angle," said Gilmore, "is that I've lost a damned good friend and the Barzac Soup Company has lost a very able home economist. She's going to be hard to replace."

"What she die of?" yapped the *Journal* reporter.

"I guess you could say she was a martyr to her profession," Gilmore said slowly. "Peggy Bayliss had to do a lot of experimental cooking and eating in her job. Her gastric system could take just so many years of it. For some time now her stomach had been acting the loyal opposition, and——"

"What did she really die of?" snarled the *News* man.

"Gents, you asked me and I'm telling you. She died at Pasteur Hospital, with a reputable physician in attendance. Her death certificate is on file there. She didn't die in any dark alley with a couple of slugs in her, so don't try to smoke up a banner line for the late edition."

"What about that Army chow Barzac is making?"

"Army chow?" Gilmore did his best to look bewildered.

"The field rations you guys are canning up there. I hear Peggy Bayliss ate some of that the day she died."

"She did?"

"You know damned well she did. We got pictures of her tasting the stuff. Two picture agencies are peddling prints of her smacking her lips. Was the stuff poisoned?"

"I think that's a pretty far-fetched conclusion," Gilmore said. He had forgotten about the photographers. He whipped Barbara with a quick side glance. "It may have been the last straw, but Peggy's illness has been going on for quite a while, off and on."

"Then what was Max Ritter doing here at the funeral?" barked the *Journal* man. "He's still lieutenant of detectives, last time I inquired."

Mistake No. 2! Ritter should have been warned away from the funeral.

"Peggy Bayliss had a very wide circle of friends," Gilmore said. "She knew all sorts of people and all sorts of people liked her—even newspaper reporters."

"Go ahead, crack wise," growled the *Tribune* man. "I thought you knew better than to hold out on the press."

"Gents, I'm not holding out on you," Gilmore declared. "I've given you all the facts that are positively known, and I'll keep you in touch if anything develops. Meanwhile why don't you check with the police and the hospital? They'll confirm everything I've said."

"We'll check," the *News* said. "Don't worry."

"Let him worry," snapped the *Journal*. "He's got plenty to worry about."

The *Journal* made a rude lip noise inappropriate to the hush of a funeral chapel, turned on his heel and marched out, followed by the *News* and *Tribune* in file. They moved slowly, as though they expected Gilmore to start after them. He didn't. He had nothing more to say, even though he felt, as he watched them leave the chapel, that his job was walking out of the door in triplicate.

He became suddenly aware that Barbara Wall was standing very close to him—pleasantly close, he noted with some perturbation.

"I'm sorry about those pictures, Gil," Barbara said. "I guess the photos I ordered gave the show away, didn't they?"

"Did they?" Gilmore wasn't so sure. None of the three reporters in question had ever impressed him as being perceptive enough to draw logical conclusions from photographs of Peggy Bayliss tasting Army rations on the day of her death. Once they had spotted Max Ritter at the funeral, of course, one of them may have whipped up a touch of deductive suspicion. But what

had brought them to the funeral in the first place? "It was probably just a coincidence," Gilmore said. "Forget it."

Barbara squeezed his right elbow. At the same moment someone touched his left elbow.

"Could I see you a moment, Gilmore?" asked Bart Remington, the production manager. "Alone?"

"Don't mind me," Barbara said. "I've got to get back to the plant. Will you be coming soon, Gil?"

"I'll see you for lunch," Gilmore said.

Remington took Gilmore's arm and walked him to the front of the chapel, near the spot where the coffin had stood. "I've been wondering about those cans of rations that Dr. Coffee wanted sent to his lab," Remington said. "Have they gone over?"

"Late yesterday," Gilmore said.

"How many?"

"I don't recall exactly. There was a sample of every batch we made—with the exception of those shipped out already in those two carloads Mr. Evans says have been turned back."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I checked with the list Mr. Quirk gave me," Gilmore said.

"Quirk?" Remington frowned. "Why Quirk?"

"He's the boss, isn't he, while Mr. Evans is away?"

"Yes, I suppose he is." Remington's frown persisted. "But I wish you'd have checked with me. After all, I'm still production manager. The original records are in my office."

"Maybe I should," Gilmore admitted. "Still— You don't really think Quirk could have faked the lists he gave me, do you?"

"No-o," said Remington, verifying his bow tie with his finger tips. Suddenly the frown disappeared, and his radiant smile broke through his doubts. "No, of course not. As you say, Quirk is boss while Evans is away. Well, I just thought I'd ask. Be seeing you."

Gilmore gave Remington time enough to disappear. Then he, too, exchanged the gloom of the chapel for the midmorning

summer glare. He walked warmly for two blocks, turned the corner, and entered the little alley in which he had parked his car. He poked his key into the door handle, then paused. Something was wrong. He could not tell what it was, but something, some familiar detail had been changed. His subconscious had recognized it, even though he examined the door in vain for some clue to his feeling.

Gilmore had never belonged to the great fraternity of Sunday morning car polishers. He was practically a stranger to auto laundries, and he had never considered patent waxes any better protection to a lacquer finish than a good coat of honest dust. He examined the finger smudges on the dusty door, but could recognize no change in pattern. Neither could he remember if any of the scratches were new. So he pulled open the door and slid under the wheel.

He jabbed the key into the ignition and extended his foot toward the starter. But he did not twist the key or touch his shoe to the pedal. Again the cold finger of premonition stroked the back of his neck.

What was wrong? Was it the fact that his rear-vision mirror was ninety degrees off horizontal? He could have done that himself, when he got out of the car. He was always bumping his head in these new low-ceiling jobs that called for certain contortionist skills. . . . Was it the smear of lipstick on the white plastic rim of the steering wheel? Any one of half a dozen women could have left that. . . . What about that two-inch snip of insulated wire on the floorboards near the brake? That could have been there for weeks without his noticing it—since the last time he had left the car in the garage for repairs. . . . Or the unfamiliar smell that simmered on the steamy interior of the car? That was probably just August—a blend of the effluvia of hot metal, well-sat-on-seat covers, lacquer and stale tobacco, cooked together vigorously in the oven of an all-steel turret top. . . . The overtones of camphor were probably just his imagination.

Quickly he rolled down the window to let in the morning.



*Pull up your socks, Gilmore, he told himself. Sure, Peggy's death knocked you for a double loop, but the funeral's over now. You've been to funerals before without getting hot flashes or cold occult premonitions. Be yourself, Gilmore. Take a deep breath.*

He inhaled slowly, but he still did not turn the ignition key or press down on the starter. He still thought he smelled camphor.

He got out and walked around the car, looking at the tires. The tires were all right, not soft in the least. He lifted the hood to look at the engine—and his knees suddenly turned to flannel. An icy spasm gripped his viscera.

Fastened to the underside of the dash with black tire tape were three yellow-brown sticks of dynamite, neatly wired into the ignition circuit.

Gilmore closed his eyes involuntarily and breathed a wordless prayer of thanks for whatever subconscious perception had kept him from switching on the ignition and stepping on the starter.

As quickly as his shaking hands would permit, he closed the hood, rolled the window up again, and locked the car. Then on numbed legs, he walked to the corner to hail a taxi.

The smell of camphor seemed to follow him.

## XI

Dr. Coffee was so preoccupied when he returned to the hospital that he didn't seem to notice the hubbub and confusion in the pathology laboratory. Cans were piled everywhere—in gleaming pyramids on the floor, in orderly rows on one of the work benches, in truncated towers on the centrifuge and on Doris Hudson's desk. Doris was busily affixing gummed labels to the cans and cataloguing the numbers in a card file. Dr. Motilal Mookerji was even busier, dividing his time between the battery of Bunsen burners over which bubbled the acidulated broth of a dozen Reinsch tests, whisking the tail of his pink turban out of reach of the pale flames as he bustled from beaker to beaker, and checking the Rube Goldberg arrangement of flasks and glass tubing in which the preliminary Marsh tests were being run. When the chief pathologist came in, he looked up from his labors.

"Five times greetings, Doctor Sahib," the Hindu resident exclaimed. "Am sincerely wishing you are not excessively morose following funereal obsequies. Was Lieutenant Ritter successful in apprehending homicidal wrongdoers?"

"Max has gone back to the station house empty-handed," the pathologist said.

"Am somewhat regretful was unable to attend sad last rites," Dr. Mookerji continued. "Am constantly amazed and bewildered by elaborate and expensive proceedings essential to disposal of dead bodies in America. In native Bengal final cremation ceremonies often economically accomplished at democratic fee of six rupees eight annas, current exchange value slightly more than one dollar, cash on barrelhead. Have frequently asked self if American custom is mere sentimental non-

sense, or constitutes philosophical expression of doubt in immortality of soul which is unconcerned in such mundane high jinks. Am——”

“How is our toxicology getting along, Doctor?” Dan Coffee interrupted.

“With utmost scientific precision,” the Hindu said, waving at the mountains of cans, “notwithstanding fact that laboratory is now resembling grocer’s shop during inventory season.”

“Anything come up this morning, Doris?” Dr. Coffee asked his head technician.

“Nothing much, Doctor. No frozen sections scheduled. Dr. Smith wants a blood-sugar estimation this afternoon. That suspected brain case died this morning, but the interns haven’t been able to talk the widow into an autopsy so far. Otherwise only routine.”

“Then maybe we’d better try to get today’s slides read before we’re completely swamped by tin cans,” the pathologist said.

He had barely settled himself at his microscope when he was interrupted by the entrance of Bob Gilmore, still pale and shaken.

“Hello, Doctor,” Gilmore said. “I’m looking for Ritter.”

“Why, Max isn’t——” Dr. Coffee glanced up from his microscope, took a second look, then arose from his chair. “Great stars, Gilmore, what’s happened to you? Did you see a ghost?”

“I damned near became a ghost,” Gilmore said. “Somebody booby-trapped my car while I was at the funeral. But for the grace of God——”

“Come in while I prescribe a few drops of aromatic spirits of Latonia.” Dr. Coffee ushered Gilmore into a small office just off the laboratory, and lifted a bottle of bourbon from the bottom drawer of his desk. “To be taken internally,” he said, “about fifty c.c.’s—straight. I think you need it.”

“I was on my way up here anyhow,” Gilmore said, as he put the bottle down, “to warn you that you’d probably have the reporters on your neck. The newspapers have got wind of something and when the reporters spotted Ritter at Peggy’s funeral,

they smelled a page-one story. When it breaks, I guess I'll be no longer connected with Barzac Soup."

"You can count on Max's discretion," Dr. Coffee said. "And as for me, I've nothing to tell them. In fact, until this business with your car this morning, I was about ready to suggest that Miss Bayliss got her arsenic elsewhere than in Barzac's kitchens. Where's your car now?"

"It's in Coolidge Lane, just off Third Street."

"Doris, try to get me Lieutenant Ritter at the police station." The pathologist pushed the bottle toward Gilmore. "Another thirty c.c.'s," he said. "Why, I was about to say that we've tested cans from about forty batches that you folks sent over here, and so far we haven't found a trace of arsenic in any of them. It's damned queer."

"How much longer do you think it will take?" Gilmore asked. "Because my interest in the case will probably be purely academic and unofficial after the afternoon papers hit the street."

"Dr. Mookerji," Dan Coffee called. "Mr. Gilmore wants to know how many more months it's going to take you to finish running those Reinsch tests?"

The round brown face of the Hindu resident appeared in the doorway. "What impatience!" he exclaimed, wagging his big head twice to the left. "Am remarking that Americans are constantly obsessed with speed and haste-making, as if universe was exploding like atom at half-past noontime Thursday next. Hindus contrariwise possess great patience because they know universe will continue until end of present Kalpa."

"What," asked Gilmore, "is a Kalpa?"

"A Kalpa," explained Dr. Mookerji, "is a day and night of Brahma the Creator, which may also be calculated as one thousand Mahayugas. At termination of said period, entire cosmos will be dissolved, thereby giving Brahma necessity of recreating same."

"I know I'm ignorant, but just how long, in days and hours, is one thousand Mahayugas?" Gilmore asked.

"Readily admit that day and night of Brahma total somewhat

longer than terrestrial twenty-four hours," the Hindu said. "In fact, exact time of Kalpa is 4,320,000,000 solar years—thus demonstrating great futility of hubbub and hurry. In India—"

"I hope," interrupted Dr. Coffee, "that we'll clean up those Reinsch tests before the end of the current Mahayuga."

"Quite," said Dr. Mookerji. "Was in fact on point of calling attention to interesting developments now in progress. Kindly approach work-bench, Doctor Sahib, and observe happenings in Beaker No. 4 and Beaker No. 7."

Six long strides carried Dr. Coffee from his office to the laboratory. He poked a glass rod into one after another of the beakers of bubbling broth made from samples of the Army field rations, seeking the metal foil stewing ominously over the Bunsen burners. As Dr. Mookerji had predicted, the copper strips lifted from the fourth and seventh beakers were coated with a dull gray deposit.

"This doesn't make sense," Dr. Coffee said. "Why should we suddenly come across arsenic in samples from two batches when the first forty or so were negative? Do you have the identification on these two samples, Doris?"

"Yes, Doctor. They came from cans with the code stamps FR 15-8191 and FR 16-8191."

"That mean anything to you, Gilmore?"

"Yes, it means that the cans were part of batches fifteen and sixteen made on the same day, the nineteenth of August, 1951. The FR is the plant symbol for field rations."

"And how many cans to a batch?"

"About seven hundred."

"Any way of telling exactly where on your third floor these particular batches were cooked?" the pathologist asked.

"Yes, I think that's possible."

Dr. Coffee carried the glass rod to the sink, rinsed his fingers, and pensively dried them. "You know," he said at last, "we may be able to make some sort of pattern out of this yet, after we've run through all those cans. There are still a lot of things I can't understand, but we've just started, after all."



"Lieutenant Ritter on the wire," Doris Hudson said.

"Hello, Max," the pathologist said into the phone. "Got anything hot? . . . Well then, I guess you better go up to Coolidge Lane just off of Third Street, and look at Gilmore's car parked there. It seems— You tell him about it, Gilmore."

Gilmore told Ritter about the crude booby trap that had been wired into his ignition circuit and began to perspire all over again while talking.

"I'll go right over," the detective said. "Want to meet me somewhere in half an hour?"

"I'll meet you right at the scene," Gilmore said. "It can't make any difference now. I'm going to get the sack anyhow."

Gilmore dismissed his cab at the entrance to the blind alley that was Coolidge Lane. As he walked toward his parked car, he recognized Lieutenant Max Ritter, looking much like a very dark, half-starved St. Bernard without his brandy cask. Ritter was bending over the engine of the car, half hidden by the raised hood. On the other side of the police detective, also involved with the innards of the motor, Gilmore thought he recognized the broad bottom and shiny trousers' seat of a plain-clothes man named Brody.

As Gilmore approached, Ritter backed away from the car and turned his long, grease-smudged face in his general direction.

"Hi, Gilmore," the detective said. "Just what brand of marihuana do you smoke?"

"I never touch the stuff," Gilmore said. "I'm an old-fashioned De Quincey man myself. I chew opium. Why do you ask?"

"You have the damndest beautifulest dreams," Ritter declared. "Now this booby trap you were telling me about. The booby part I can guess easy enough. That's me. But I'll be damned if we can find the trap. Do you find any trap, Brody?"

The plain-clothes man withdrew his head from the visceral regions of Gilmore's car, slid the back of a grimy hand across his nose to eliminate a drop of perspiration and left an in-

triguing cabalistic design in its place. He said something which sounded to Gilmore like "horse whip" and subsided into silence.

"Where's this dynamite you told me about on the phone?" Ritter demanded.

Gilmore had no answer. The dynamite that had been wired into the ignition circuit was gone. So was the smell of camphor.

"It's . . . I . . . Well, it seems to have been removed," Gilmore said. "I . . . Well . . ."

"Yeah," Ritter said. "If it was ever there."

"It was there all right," Gilmore said. "And it stank of camphor. A piece of the tire tape is still sticking to the underside of the dash. And look. The ignition wires have been spliced together again. Do you want me to step on the starter?"

"I don't want you to step on nothing."

"And look. If somebody was monkeying around inside here, why—"

"Keep your mitts out of there," Ritter said, pushing Gilmore away from the car. "I'm away ahead of you. I've already sent for the fingerprint boys and I don't want you messing things up. Anything else?"

"No," Gilmore hesitated. "Except that if somebody baited the trap during the funeral, and then tried to tidy things up after he saw me back away from the bait, then there's a chance that he must have been seen. Why don't you try—?"

"Sure, I'll try," Ritter said, eyeing the two rows of three-storied buildings that lined Coolidge Lane. "It's going to take me ten men and half a day, but we'll try. Meanwhile, why don't you go fishing or something?"

"Okay, so I give off a perfume like good ripe bait," Gilmore said, "but I think I ought to tell you about a few strikes I've had before this one here that got away. Last night when I came home after Peggy died, the doors to my garage were closed, although I always keep them open. When I got out of my car, somebody socked me in the eye."

"Who?" Ritter demanded.

"I don't know. It was dark. But when I got inside, my mother

said some man had called up to warn me that curiosity killed a cat."

"Nobody recognized the voice, of course."

"No. But I think we'll have to consider the possibility of Peggy Bayliss's ex-husband. I haven't seen him since shortly after Peggy died. He wasn't at the funeral this morning. But I think I told you that he'd warned me that I was headed for trouble." Gilmore paused. He wondered if he should disclose the fact of Bayliss's extracurricular visit the night before Peggy died. He decided against it on the grounds that it might incriminate him. *Émile* had apparently been removed from the picture without involving him. . . .

"I remember," Ritter said. "You told me Bayliss called his ex-wife from Chicago the day before she died. Right?"

"Right," said Gilmore. "He called from Chicago."

"Well, it ain't right. It's wrong," Ritter countered. "I checked the chief operator and all the little operators at the Barzac switchboard. I also checked the records, just in case some little gal don't retain too well. And I find there was no Chicago call came through the Barzac switchboard that morning. There was just one long-distance call before noon, and it was from Washington, D.C. So either he was lying or she was lying."

"I'll be damned," Gilmore said.

"And I'm inclined to think that *he* was the liar," Ritter pursued, "because I been checking with Chicago and Bayliss ain't been seen around the ten-bucks-a-week room he calls his home for the last week. So if you're sure you saw Bayliss in Northbank—"

"I'm positive."

"Then go fishing," Ritter said, "but call me the minute you lay eyes on this guy Bayliss again. Urgent. Okay?"

"Okay," said Gilmore, "but until you give me my car back, I don't think I'll do much fishing. I'll stick to hunting—skunk."

## XII

The early edition of the *Northbank Journal* hit the streets at noon. Although the death of Peggy Bayliss had rated only ten lines on the obituary page the day before, Peggy's funeral was a page-one story, with a two-column cut. The picture, of course, was of Peggy smacking her lips over Barzac's epicurean creation for the Army.

The story was a masterpiece of sly innuendo. There was a low, sweeping obeisance to the laws of libel, naturally. There were no accusations, no controvertible facts, not even editorial conclusions couched in such libel-proof phrases as "it is alleged" or "according to the police." But the juxtaposition of facts was so skillfully accomplished, the chronology of the gay tasting session marking the inauguration of Barzac's production of field rations, the symptoms of acute gastritis (described by an unnamed intern at Pasteur) and, finally, Peggy's death, could lead the reader to only one possible implication. To punctuate the story, the last line read: "Among those present at the funeral chapel was Max Ritter, Lieutenant of Detectives, Northbank Police Department."

Just in case anyone failed to get the point, the story was followed—through sheer accident of make-up, no doubt—by a short interview with a municipal councilman, announcing that he intended to introduce a resolution at the next session of the Council, calling for an anti-Communist oath to be taken by all employees of plants within the city limits of Northbank working on military contracts, "in order to demonstrate to the subversive elements in our midst that they cannot with impunity carry out their sabotage and anti-American activities in the staunchly patriotic city of Northbank."

The *Journal's* story had obviously been picked up by the press association wires for relay eastward well in advance of the closing of the New York Stock Exchange. Because three o'clock newscasts over Northbank radio stations all carried some variation of the following: "And here is the Wall Street summary. The Stock Market closing was firm. . . . Rails and industrials were slightly higher. . . . Dow-Jones Industrial averages up thirty-two cents. . . . Only feature of a dull trading day was a sharp break in Barzac Soup during the last hour, closing at 46, off 9½. . . ."

The newscast ended at 3:05 p.m. At 3:10 Gilmore was summoned to the purple imperium of Mr. Eugene Evans. The chronology was as significant as the snide inferences of the *Journal* story.

Although the afternoon heat was stifling, the frosty atmosphere of the general manager's office extended over a wide radius. The mail boy coming out of the office detoured sharply to avoid greeting Gilmore. The secretary of the outer sanctum barely nodded her permission to enter the holy of holies. The bald pate of Mr. Evans himself was spangled with perspiration, yet his thin lips seemed pinched with cold. On one side of him, his assistant, Mr. Quirk, hunched his narrow shoulders against some non-existent Arctic wind. On the other Bart Remington rubbed his fingers as though they were too stiff to make their customary verification of his bow tie. Only Barbara Wall, the crisp, eternally cool Barbara, seemed to wilt with the heat. Her retroussé nose was shiny; a wisp of honey-colored hair was attractively out of place and plastered to one temple by the August afternoon dampness; her eyes burned, not with ambition this time but with earnest concern. Never, Gilmore reflected, had she appeared so nearly beautiful.

Instead of asking him to sit down, the general manager kept Gilmore standing in front of his desk like an errant schoolboy. For an instant, Gilmore wished that he had brought along a bright red apple.

"I suppose you know why I called you," Mr. Evans said.



"No," lied Gilmore, "unless you've managed to solve the riddle of Peggy's death and want to cut me in."

"Have you seen the afternoon papers, Gilmore?"

"Yes."

"In view of the adverse publicity received by Barzac in connection with the death of Peggy Bayliss, can you think of any reason why you shouldn't resign?"

"I can think of several," Gilmore replied. "First, I'd be giving up my severance pay. Second, I——"

He stopped suddenly. He turned his head slowly to look at Barbara Wall. She was not looking in his direction. He thought, *Here's your chance, Baby. Here's your chance to square yourself for the dirty trick you played on me in New York. Here's your chance to come clean, to tell the truth and let the chips fall where they may. All you have to do is say, "The responsibility for the break in the afternoon papers is mine. Taking photos of Peggy at the tasting session was my idea. I brought the photographers to the session, and the photos brought the reporters to the funeral this morning. Gil had nothing to do with it."*

But Barbara said nothing at all.

"And second?" prompted Mr. Evans.

"Second," Gilmore resumed, "nothing I said to the reporters today had the slightest relation to the story that appeared in the newspapers. I covered up the best I could."

"Evidently," was Mr. Quirk's ready comment. "That's why Barzac stock dropped more than nine points in one hour on the New York Stock Exchange today. I must remind you, Gilmore, that in the absence of Mr. Evans yesterday, I gave you all fair warning that any mention in the press connecting the death of Miss Bayliss with her consumption of our tinned rations would call for summary dismissal. You did talk to the press, Gilmore. Therefore the responsibility is clear."

Again Gilmore looked at Barbara. She returned his stare without flinching. He said: "I spoke to the reporters at the request of Mr. Evans. I did not summon the reporters to the funeral. Nothing I said to them could possibly be considered

the basis for the story that the *Journal* used this afternoon."

"We understand that, Gilmore," Evans interposed. "But if the Army comes into the picture now, it will be your responsibility. It was your original idea to bring Dr. Coffee and the police into this unfortunate affair."

"If the Army moves in on you tomorrow," Gilmore said, "you can be properly thankful that you've got a clean record to show. You test your product so thoroughly that you've sacrificed a valuable member of your staff. You've had an eminent pathologist analyzing every batch of rations, to determine if sabotage is involved. Furthermore, you've had the police at work while you've recalled all previous shipments for re-testing. All this, I'm sure, will make a favorable impression on the F.B.I."

"F.B.I.?" echoed Quirk. "Have you called in the F.B.I., Gilmore?"

"No, but Mr. Evans has."

"Ah, that," said Mr. Evans. "That's another matter entirely. Or it was. Possibly, as you said the other night, Gilmore, there may be a tie-up. However——"

"Furthermore," Gilmore continued, "you can be pretty sure that the Northbank police flashed the F.B.I. the moment it was evident that we were making poisoned rations for the Army."

"Nonsense, Gilmore." Evans's nostrils were quivering; his inhaler would not be long in making an appearance. "There's no evidence that Miss Bayliss was poisoned by our product. Dr. Coffee himself assured me this morning he had found not a single trace of arsenic in any of the cans he had tested."

"That was *early* this morning," Gilmore said. "Since then he's found arsenic in at least two batches. In view of this fact, I'm not going to resign. You'll have to fire me, Mr. Evans."

"Good gosh, Mr. Evans!" Bart Remington spoke for the first time since the interview had begun. "If you fire Gilmore now, the newspapers will be sure you're hiding something. And if Coffee has really found arsenic . . . You'd better reconsider, Mr. Evans."

The general manager's lips parted and his eyes narrowed. A sneeze seemed imminent, but no sneeze came. Not even the inhaler appeared. He closed his mouth and picked up the telephone.

"Get me Dr. Coffee at Pasteur Hospital," he commanded the instrument. "Quickly."

Mr. Evans banged down the telephone and glared at it, as if defying it to ring. No one spoke. The frost seemed to form on his gray mustache. A trickle of perspiration escaped from his bald head and inched timidly down one temple. Then the telephone rang—defiantly.

"Hello, Doctor. This is Evans at . . . Oh yes. You did? . . . Is that so? Nine? . . . Well, yes, I suppose we could. I'll have to inquire. I'll let you know as soon as we can set a time."

Mr. Evans sighed as he hung up. He stared reproachfully at the instrument for five seconds before he announced: "Dr. Coffee has discovered arsenic in nine batches of our Army rations. This does seem to be something of a plot after all. Under the circumstances, Gilmore, I'm withdrawing my demand for your resignation—temporarily. Consider yourself on probation for the time being."

Mr. Evans paused, as though he expected Gilmore to fall on his knees, kiss the hem of his pongee jacket, or at least mumble a few words of gratitude. As Gilmore said nothing, Mr. Evans went on:

"Dr. Coffee suggests that we resume production of the rations. He'd like it done on the night shift if possible, so he can follow the operation through every step. He seems to have a theory of some kind. What about it, Remington?"

"It's too late for the second shift today," Remington said. "I'm pretty sure we can set it up by tomorrow night, though. I'll check with Lenormand."

"Good. Keep me informed." Mr. Evans leaned back in his swivel chair. He gave a peremptory nod, like a schoolmaster dismissing his class. "Thank you. That's all."

On the way out, Barbara caught Gilmore's arm. There was

an unfamiliar glow in the long, amber eyes that looked up at him searchingly. She said: "Gil, you're a surprising guy."

"Sure," Gilmore replied quickly. "Change of pace. Anything to keep 'em guessing."

Barbara shook her head, but she still clung to Gilmore's arm. Her voice was scarcely more than a murmur as she said: "You know, don't you, Gil, that what you did just now—or what you didn't do—has wiped out the last few years completely? We do have things to talk about, important things. What about tonight?"

Gilmore looked closely into Barbara's upturned face, trying to analyze the expression in her eyes. Was it anxiety—concern for herself, as usual? Or concern for him? Or was it just plain, unadulterated tenderness? He didn't know. He would probably never know; he was just congenitally incapable of knowing—or too indifferent to—whatever went on in a woman's mind. He did know, however, what he wanted, and that he had decided to quit fighting against it. He had just proved that to himself beyond recall. So he would take what he wanted—once he had cleared up one minor point.

"About that copy of *Émile*," he said, "did you—?"

"I haven't been home since we talked about it," Barbara interrupted quickly. "I'll know in an hour. Okay?"

"At the funeral this morning you said you couldn't wait to get home to see if *Émile* was still there."

"I know. I didn't know it was a matter of minutes with you, Gil. Shall I call you in an hour? Or can you wait until dinner-time? We do have a date tonight, Gil. Okay?"

"Okay," Gilmore said. "Since I'm on parole, let's celebrate. Tonight."

Barbara's smile was pleasant and spontaneous, without the usual self-conscious crinkles at the corners of her lips. Her dimples showed. "Good." She imitated Mr. Evans's voice. "Dinner, then. With me."

### XIII

Dr. Coffee was finishing up his diagnosis of the day's surgicals. His keen eyes squinting into the binocular microscope, his long, bony fingers twisting the focusing knob, he dictated to Doris Hudson.

"Lymph node," he said. "Normal architecture . . . Marked inflammation but no thickening of the capsule . . . Some foci of necrosis, surrounded by giant cells . . . No indication of malignancy." Dr. Coffee shifted lenses, from low to high power and back again. He frowned. "Doris, ask for a sample of the patient's blood for bacteriology. I suspect tularemia. Next."

"That's all," said Doris Hudson, closing her notebook.

Dr. Coffee snapped out the light behind the microscope, stood up, stretched his long legs with audible but incomprehensible comment. He stepped over the barrier of Barzac tin cans that separated his private office from the laboratories.

"Except for one thing," Doris added. "That man Gilmore from the soup company phoned. He said he'd be over at five-thirty. Do you want to wait for him?"

"Guess I'd better," the pathologist said. "Max Ritter asked me to hold him until he got here, and Max is on his way now. He—" Dr. Coffee interrupted himself to pick up three cans which he had kicked off the top of the pyramid in his progress across the laboratory. He made sure that the labels had not been disturbed, and put the cans back in place.

"How's the quantitative coming along, Dr. Mookerji?" he asked, as he came between the Hindu resident and the complicated system of beakers, burners and glass tubing.

Dr. Mookerji did not reply at once. He was bending over a precision scale. With a pair of tweezers he placed into the bal-



ance tiny weights no larger than snowflakes. He made a notation and looked up, his round, brown face beaming.

"Am just computing weight of arsenic mirrors resulting from first tests of liver tissue in triplicate," he said. "Please verify figures, Doctor Sahib."

The pathologist peered over his resident's chubby shoulder. His underlip protruded as he studied the notations. He looked at the scale. "Well, that seems to settle it," he said. "Did you—? Hello, Gilmore. Glad you could come. I thought you might be able to make it. I saw the afternoon papers. Are you a gentleman of leisure now?"

"That was the sentence, but it's been suspended," Gilmore said. "I thought I might find Ritter here. I'd like to get my car back, if it's been demilitarized. I've got a date tonight."

"Max will be along in a minute," Dr. Coffee said. He nodded toward his office. "Let's go inside and wait for him."

The pathologist tossed a pack of cigarettes across the desk as he sat down. "The pattern seems to be shaping up. I need some more information from you."

"What's the pattern?" Gilmore asked.

"We've had luck with our quantitative analysis," Dr. Coffee said, lighting his cigarette and passing the match to Gilmore. "Our zinc and standard solutions proved arsenic-free from the start, so we've already got some preliminary results from the autopsy. Dr. Mookerji has already demonstrated seventy-three milligrams of arsenic in the liver tissues. That's more than a grain—and three grains is considered a fatal dose when absorbed. Tissue from the stomach and other organs will certainly give us more than this figure. Therefore I can say definitely that Miss Bayliss died of arsenic poisoning. I can say further that she undoubtedly absorbed the arsenic from the Army rations she consumed at the plant on the morning of her death. As you probably know, we have found arsenic in nine batches of your product."

"So Mr. Evans says."

"Nine batches," Dr. Coffee repeated. "Why nine? Why not

ten? Or six? Or why not all? By the time Dr. Mookerji and I have finished our tests, we may have the answer to that question. And we may even be able to answer other questions."

"Such as?"

"Such as who? And how? And why?"

"The *why* shouldn't be too difficult," Gilmore said. "The rations were bound for the United States Army. I think it's pretty obvious that Peggy just happened to get in the way of a plot for mass murder. I don't think nine batches of rations—that's between six and seven thousand cans—were poisoned just to kill Peggy Bayliss. You don't hunt squirrels with a thousand-pound demolition bomb."

"Y-yes," the pathologist admitted hesitantly. "But it's not quite that simple. I've got to find the answers to a lot more questions before I'll accept that explanation."

"What questions, Doctor?"

"Let me ask the questions for a while, Gilmore," Dr. Coffee said. "I'll have to do much more asking before I can start giving out answers. For instance, would arsenic be readily available at the Barzac cannery? In quantity, I mean?"

"Sure," Gilmore said. "Barzac buys arsenic by the ton."

"Great stars!" Dr. Coffee said. "Arsenic by the ton? What for?"

"Our Agriculture Department uses tons of white arsenic to make insecticide spray," Gilmore explained. "You see, Barzac is godfather to about eighty per cent of the tomatoes we use. We've found that a certain type of tomato makes the best soups. We go to great lengths to get as much uniformity as possible in taste and color. So every winter we grow millions of seedling tomato plants in the South. We fly them north as soon as the frost is out of the ground. We've got about a thousand acres of stock farms in this county and the next. We sell the seedlings to the farmers at three dollars a thousand plants—on condition, of course, that they agree to sell us the tomatoes at thirty-five dollars a ton the next fall. By selling nearly 100,000,000 seedlings a

year at less than cost, we're sure of getting the kind of tomatoes we want."

"And you spray these plants with arsenic?"

"Only the young plants. As soon as the flowers begin to form, all spraying is stopped, naturally, so the tomatoes won't be contaminated."

"And where is this arsenic stored, Gilmore? At your plant here in Northbank?"

"It probably passes through our receiving warehouse at the plant, but it would be moved immediately to the Agriculture Department stores near Boone Point."

"Any chance of an error—of a shipment of arsenic getting detoured to your kitchens by mistake?"

"Last week I would have said it was impossible," Gilmore said. "I still think it's impossible. But in view of what's happened, I'll just say it's highly unlikely."

Dr. Coffee seemed to meditate. He ran his fingers through his tousled straw-colored hair. "I'll have to see the whole process from the beginning," he said after a pause. "When do you people think you can start production again on those rations?"

"Second shift tomorrow, probably. That means they'll be in full swing by early evening."

"Max and I will be over," the pathologist said. "Here's Max now."

The lanky police detective was crossing the laboratory with lengthy strides. His dark felt hat was pulled down over much of his long, melancholy face, yet his concealed eyes seemed to be functioning perfectly. He greeted each occupant of the lab with a clumsy gesture of his right hand.

"Hi, Doris," he said. "Hi, Swami. Hi, Doc. I see you got our Visionary with you."

"Do I get my car back, Lieutenant?" Gilmore asked. "Or is it still impounded?"

"I still would like to know what kind of hop makes you dream up those beautiful booby-trap dreams you tell me about, Gilmore," Ritter said. "We still can't find none."

"Lieutenant, you break my heart," Gilmore said. "I feel guilty as all hell for not stepping on the starter. If I'd blown myself up, maybe you'd believe me. Can I get my car back anyhow? I got a date tonight."

"You get it back," Ritter said. "It's downstairs now. We're through with it."

"Did you find anything?"

The detective slid his narrow hips over the edge of Dr. Coffee's desk; as he sat he helped himself to one of Dr. Coffee's cigarettes. He took his time about striking a match, and squinted quizzically through the smoke at Gilmore when he finally said: "A little."

"Max, stop looking like a Saint Bernard that swallowed a brandy cask," Dr. Coffee said. "You've dug up something. Come on. Spill it."

"I ain't got much," Ritter said. "We did find a woman in Coolidge Lane who saw a car drive up behind Gilmore's at about the time the funeral was starting. She said there were two men in it. One of 'em, a man in overalls, got out, lifted the hood, and tinkered around inside for a while. Then they both drove off. She said she thought he was a repairman. She didn't see him come back."

"He must have come back," Gilmore insisted. "He must have been waiting in the neighborhood to watch. When he saw me rush off after discovering the booby trap, I guess he came back to destroy the evidence. Could the woman identify the man in overalls if she saw him again?"

"She never saw his face," Ritter replied.

"Did she remember the license number of his car?"

"No."

"Or the make?"

"She thinks it was a dark blue coupé. Some dark color, anyway. She thinks it might have been a Chevy, but she ain't sure."

"Max, you still look like a canary that swallowed a Bengal tiger," Dr. Coffee interrupted. "You're holding out on us."

"There's just one more thing," the detective admitted. "We developed a perfect set of prints off your chrome radiator shell, Gilmore. But perfect! Good enough to give us a Henry classification. I wired the classification to Washington. You can say what you want about this guy Hoover, but that punch-card system they got of filing fingerprints down there is the berries. I already got an answer back half an hour ago."

"You mean the F.B.I. had his prints on file?"

Ritter nodded. "No criminal record. He was printed when he went to work for some aircraft factory in 1944. Gilmore, do you know anybody named Christopher Froley?"

"Chris Froley?" Gilmore's mouth remained open for a few seconds in incredulous surprise. "Of course I know Froley. He's third-floor shop steward at our No. 1 Plant."

"That's where the Army rations were being canned, isn't it?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Yes."

"Well, Froley left his prints on your radiator," Ritter said. "You sure he still works for Barzac?"

"Positive. Any reason why he shouldn't be?"

"Funny thing about Froley," Ritter said. "I was just talking to your plant manager—what's his name?"

"Evans. Eugene Evans."

"That's right, Evans. Well, Evans says he wrote to the F.B.I. about ten days, two weeks ago. Says he wanted a check on a report that Froley was a Commie. Well, maybe he did and maybe not. Only the F.B.I. got no record of the letter."

"But they do have a record of Froley's Communist connections?"

"Sure, that they got. Froley was a card-carrying Commie as late as last year. He— What the hell you laughing at, Gilmore?"

The strange sounds being emitted by Gilmore could perhaps be technically classified as laughter, but there was no mirth in them. There was no mirth in Gilmore either, as he realized bitterly that Froley's prints on his car might have nothing to do



with the death of Peggy Bayliss or a plot to poison a dozen American regiments.

"It just occurred to me," Gilmore said, "that Chris Froley might have wanted to blow me to pieces for purely personal reasons. He vaguely threatened to kill me the other night."

"Kill you?" Ritter echoed. "What for?"

"He thought I was playing around with his wife."

"Well, well!" Ritter made resonant, deprecatory lip noises. "And were you?"

"No, you cad. And you know damned well that even if I were, I'd deny it."

"So you don't think Froley's being a Commie has anything to do with guys calling you up at night and plopping you in the eye?" Ritter clucked some more. "You think it's just he's trying to save his wife from worse than death by scaring the pants off you?"

"Well, I'm not sure." Gilmore hesitated. He wondered just how much he should tell about *Émile* and Zina and Bayliss at this point. He'd know in a little while about *Émile*. . . . "There's also that warning from Bayliss."

"Yeah, you told me." Ritter's lips stopped clucking and widened into a big red-and-white grin. He tossed a bunch of keys across the desk.

"Okay," he said. "Your car is down front—in the 'Doctors Only' parking space to the left. Have fun while it lasts. The F.B.I. will probably be moving in on you any minute now."

## XIV

Emerging from the hospital, Gilmore thought he recognized his car at the spot indicated by Ritter. He was not quite sure, however. Someone was sitting in the front seat.

A stab of apprehension sent him hurrying toward the parking space. As he approached, he verified his ownership of the car. He also identified the person in the front seat. His apprehension was not diminished by his recognition of Frances Frolely.

Frances was wearing dark green slacks and sweater, and a vivid green scarf—not precisely the most comfortable costume for a hot summer evening, Gilmore mused, but certainly an arresting one. She was highly photogenic in a sweater—much more so than in the blue blouse of Barzac's carrot line—even if her bangs did cling damply to her forehead in a dark arabesque. She had snuggled down cosily in the car, prepared for a long wait. She drew deep, contented draughts from a cigarette, and the deep green billows of her sweater responded magnificently to the slow rhythm of her lungs.

"What are you doing here, Mrs. Frolely?" Gilmore asked sharply.

"Oh, hello." The girl's long dark eyelashes gave a provocative flutter. "I tried to reach you at your office, but your secretary said you were at Pasteur Hospital. So I came on over. And I recognized your car, of course."

"Of course," Gilmore echoed. It seemed to be a family trait of the Frolelys. "What can I do for you, Mrs. Frolely?"

"Don't call me Mrs. Frolely. Please. On you it's not becoming."

"All right, Mrs. Frolely. I'll call you Frances."

"Everybody I like calls me Frankie." The eyelashes worked overtime to remove any possible misunderstanding as to Frankie's likes and dislikes.

"I'll bet," Gilmore said warily. He opened the door, and found himself admiring the scenery, despite Max Ritter's disclosure that Frankie's husband might be given to homicidal whimsys. He slid under the wheel. "What do you want, Frankie?"

"I had to see you, Gil. Can't we go somewhere and talk?"

"Not now. I'm due elsewhere. Overdue, in fact."

"But it's important, Gil." Her fingers closed on Gilmore's arm with unmistakable urgency. "Can't we go some place where we can just have a quiet drink and talk?"

"Nope," said Gilmore. "I've got a date."

"Later then? I want to tell you something."

"Out, Frankie." Gilmore stepped on the starter. He held his breath until the preliminary whirr brought a deeper purring from the motor. He reached across the girl's knees to open the opposite door.

"Don't you like me any more, Gil?"

"I'm mad about you, Frankie. I'm just not free tonight."

Frankie stepped from the car but she held the door open. "I'll be at the Anchor Bar on River Street at ten o'clock tonight," she said. "See you then."

Gilmore smiled, shook his head, and put the car in gear. Frankie smiled, too, and the expression of her warm brown eyes changed almost imperceptibly. They still glowed, but they were no longer warm; the glow was more like the warning incandescence of molten metal.

"You better be there," she said, "if you want to know what happened to George Bayliss." She slammed the door.

This time it was Gilmore's expression that changed. Frankie Frolely obviously noted it. As he drove off, she waved to him, smiling confidently.

"Don't forget," she called. "Ten o'clock. The Anchor. On River Street."

Gilmore did not look back, but he knew she was still smiling confidently.

## XV

Gilmore had never been inside Barbara's apartment in Northbank, but he knew in advance that it would be pretty much a replica of the one he used to haunt in Manhattan, when their employer-employee relationship had been reversed. It would be in an imposing building with an expensive address and an impressive doorman. And it would be small; Barbara valued a good address above *lebensraum*, and her means were far from unlimited; a lioness's share of her salary had always been earmarked for clothes—and for shoes, dozens of shoes. Barbara had a passion for shoes. At this very moment she was probably surveying the racks in her closet, trying to decide if she should wear her needle heels or her Cuban heels, weighing open toes against a two-toned *suède* sports job, Greek sandals against something French and sophisticated. This would probably go on, Gilmore anticipated, long after the colored maid would have opened the door for him, perhaps for at least twenty minutes while he sat with moderate discomfort on a coldly modern chair, his green florist's box on his knees, staring first at a Grant Wood (in reproduction, of course) on one wall, or at a Matisse or a Gauguin on the other.

At last Barbara would make a breathless entrance, trailing wisps of chiffon and \$50-an-ounce fragrance which marked her transformation from career girl to woman of the world. Then the maid would serve a chain-store version of Javanese *kroepoek* and indifferent bottled martinis—Barbara took great pride in her inability to mix a cocktail—while they argued about where they would dine. This routine, too, would be the same: Gilmore would suggest five or six restaurants specializing in food rather than glamor. Barbara would object to them all. There was no air-conditioning or too much garlic in everything, or the waiters

were rude, or there were wine stains on the checkered tablecloths. They would compromise on some place of her choice—some noisy, rococo dungeon with a name band, just enough light for the maître d'hôtel to recognize the denomination of large banknotes and for distinguished guests to admire each other's jewelry—a high-class clip joint where leathery flounder passed for sole at four dollars a filet.

Ever since he had decided, that afternoon, to turn the clock back and stop pretending he had never been in love with Barbara, Gilmore had been looking forward to a revival of the old routine. Even the apparition of Frankie Froley, with her cryptic reference to George Bayliss—a reminder to Gilmore that he was still living on the fringes of a nightmare—could not dull his pleasurable anticipation. After leaving Frankie, he had indulged himself in an unaccustomed caprice of boyish sentimentality. He had stopped at a florist's shop for a corsage of gardenias.

To the old routine, however, something new had been added. The address, the façade, and the doorman of Barbara's apartment house were properly impressive, but when he reached her floor and rang the bell, he noted the door stood ajar. Barbara's voice, muted by several doors, called: "Come in, Gil."

Maid's night out, Gil mused. Then he sniffed at the pleasant aroma of browning onions, and a puzzled trident formed on his forehead. The trident deepened when Barbara came through a swinging door, dabbing at her face with the lace hem of an apron and leaving a smudge of flour on the tip of her nose. Gilmore was so surprised that he almost forgot the question uppermost in his mind—almost, if not quite. But *Émile* took second place while he extended the green box and said: "Hi. Here's something for the kiddies."

Barbara managed to close the door and open the green box with one continuous motion. "Gil, you darling!" she squealed. "Gardenias. You brought me gardenias on our first date in New York. Remember?"



"I remember," Gilmore said. "That was the first time I kissed you."

Gilmore remembered, too, that it had been a shy, tentative brushing of lips that by its innate warmth and molecular sympathy had quickly blazed into a threatening conflagration. Shyly, tentatively, he refreshed his memory. The warmth, the molecular affinity had not changed. In fact, there seemed imminent danger of a possible chain reaction when Barbara broke off contact and rushed for the kitchenette, trailing a disconnected and unpunctuated verbal slip-stream:

"Good Lord, I've got something on the stove. . . . I hope it isn't burned. . . . You don't mind eating here, do you, Gil? . . . I thought it would be better, the day of Peggy's funeral. . . . Come on in and talk to me if you want. . . . Or better yet, mix us a daiquiri. . . . You'll find the rum in the closet. . . . I've already squeezed the limes. . . . The ice is under the—"

"Barbaral Please! Take a deep breath or you'll suffocate," Gilmore interrupted. "And better give me a chance to get *my* breath. You've changed so, Barbara, since I kissed you last."

"No, I haven't, Gil. Not a bit."

"But you're cooking dinner. When I knew you in New York, you took great pride in not knowing a thing about cooking, and you swore on a stack of cookbooks you'd never learn."

Barbara stopped short, turned in her tracks, and transferred the flour smudge from her nose to Gilmore's left cheek.

"That," she said, "was an awful fib. I've told you so many, you really don't know very much about me. But now that you've stopped pretending yourself, I've decided to tell all, come what may. I— Good grief, it is burning!"

Barbara resumed her rush for the kitchenette. There followed a banging of oven doors, the clang of pans and the brittle click of dish on dish, the raucous scrape of spoon on pot-bottoms, and the tap-wide gush of water. From somewhere within a cloud of steam Barbara's voice was saying: "Daiquiris, Gil. Remember? Rum . . . in the closet. Limes . . ."

Gilmore took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and got to work. First he transferred the gardenias from the top of the television set to the icebox, taking out the ice cubes on the return trip. He found the rum and the squeezed lime juice, but a still-hunt for the sugar took him three minutes. Another three minutes—plus a shower of impatient invective and a narrow escape from being scalded to death in the narrow kitchenette—got him a dish towel and a potato masher, necessary ingredients for cracking the ice. Dropping the grenadine into the wastebasket took no time at all. (Who the dickens had told Barbara that grenadine went into daiquiris?) All other ingredients and utensils were ready at hand, and the timing was perfect. By the time Barbara re-emerged, without apron, with every honey-colored hair back in place, and nose freshly powdered, the green-gold cocktails were just beginning to frost the glasses.

"Gil," she said, "I've had to switch menus. An emergency. I wanted to show off, but—I hope you like spaghetti."

"Love it," said Gilmore, "if—and you must excuse the expression—it isn't from the can. I'm not belittling our alma mater, please understand. It just happens that I like it the way the Italians eat it. I like it—"

"*Al dente*," Barbara said. "Me too. We'll eat it that way. It doesn't take so long, either."

"But you'll have to watch it and bite it occasionally," Gilmore said. "Six and a half minutes. So you can only have one drink first."

Barbara held out her hand. "What shall we drink to? Peggy's memory?"

Gilmore shrugged. Barbara was watching him closely over the rim of her glass. She went on:

"Or to crime—and punishment? Or without punishment?"

"To the spaghetti," Gilmore said. "Down the hatch."

A look of comic dismay—perhaps it wasn't comic—spread over Barbara's face as she watched Gilmore's cocktail disappear without an intervening swallow. "I was hoping," she said, "that you'd propose a toast to reunion in Northbank."

"That's for the next one," Gilmore said, reaching for the shaker. "What about *Émile*?"

"Gil, it's gone."

"I was afraid of that."

"I should have told you when you came in. I just didn't want to spoil the mood, but I guess it had to be spoiled sooner or later. Does it mean trouble?"

"I don't know yet." Gilmore poured the daiquiris. "Did you call the police?"

"What was the use? I didn't know anything was taken until just a few hours ago."

"I thought you'd be interested in how the burglars got in, for your own protection."

"Oh, that was simple. It was a celluloid job, Bart Remington says. Bart says anybody can open most spring locks with a sheet of metal or some stiff plastic."

"So you told Remington?"

"Bart was bringing me home when I found out about it. The door was open."

Gilmore raised his glass. "Let's have another," he said.

They had two more without adverse effect on the dinner. The spaghetti came to table presenting just the proper degree of firmness to the teeth, the sauce presenting a surprising spiciness to the palate. Barbara's former aversion to garlic seemed to have disappeared; there was even a soupçon in the salad dressing. All in all, the meal was so satisfying, so unlike the Barbara he had known, that Gilmore was not even curious about the original *plat de résistance* that had gone up in smoke and charcoal. He did remain curious about other things, however. It may have been the three daiquiris, but something was bringing most of his suspicions back to life. If it wasn't the cocktails—or the heat of August—it was the nervous way Barbara was handling her salad fork, the self-conscious gaiety of her laugh, or the stiffness of her poise on the edge of one of the folding chairs she had set up with the card table to convert the living room into a dining room.

"Tell me," Gilmore said, putting down his napkin, "why you invented those awful fibs about your culinary ignorance. Or have you changed your mind?"

"I haven't changed my mind, Gil. I'll give you a fib-by-fib breakdown. Shall we have a brandy first—to stimulate my conscience? Or is it too hot for brandy?"

Gilmore thought it was never too hot for brandy as long as it was good brandy. And he was pleased to note that Barbara had inexplicably developed an improved taste in brandy; perhaps just improved knowledge, he decided, after watching her gulp down two ounces of twenty-year-old cognac that could profitably have been sipped for at least twenty minutes.

"Let's review the fibbing," Barbara refilled her brandy glass. "Do you remember the sort of person I've always pretended to be?"

Gilmore remembered very well. He reconstructed the picture she had once painted of herself. Daughter of a rich family, brought up by servants and tutors, bred to the idea that cooking and teaching were inferior trades to be practised exclusively by the less fortunate members of a caste-divided society—a philosophy reinforced by three years at Sweet Willow College, with summers in Europe, of course. She had been forced to leave college in her senior year when her father lost all his money—through misplaced confidence in a swindling partner—and shot himself, unselfishly to provide for his family through whatever insurance had not been mortgaged. Her mother, however, had used the insurance money to pay off the late Mr. Wall's debts, and had died of shame within the year. Barbara had consequently been forced to go to work, but had been true to her heritage in choosing a genteel profession.

"A very moving story," Gilmore concluded.

"I thought so, too," Barbara said. "I was very proud of it. But of course it's not true."

The true story? Barbara's father had been neither rich nor a suicide. He was dead; that much was correct; but not entirely by his own hand. He had died of acute alcoholism in a state



hospital in the Middle West somewhere. It was also correct that she had, in her early youth, been inculcated with the idea that cooking was a drab, inferior trade, but the idea grew out of her own experience. She had spent most of her teens cooking for a drunken father and seven brothers and sisters while her mother was out earning a living for the family.

Then came sudden freedom as the family dispersed. First Papa Wall and his DT's were carted off to die at public expense. Then Barbara's fifteen-year-old younger sister got married and her older sister ran off with a carnival. Three brothers vanished within a few weeks—one into the Navy, one into Reform School (via Juvenile Court) and the third into parts unknown. Two months later her mother married a widowed garage mechanic, and took the two youngest with her.

So Barbara took off her apron and went to college—not to Sweet Willow, but to a land-grant college in a Midwestern state, where she could work her own way. She worked hard, not only for her board and keep and at her studies, but to make herself into the kind of person she had decided she wanted to be. At first she knew only what she did *not* want to be, but it was to be the basis for her whole new creed—a sort of Greek legend in which she was to play both Pygmalion and Galatea. First of all, she was determined that come what may, she would never, never be poor again. She was just as determined that whatever happened, she would never again cook for anyone, not even herself. And she was even more determined that she would never be dependent upon anyone but herself, especially not a man. Men, she had learned by family experience, were unreliable. Furthermore, she had made up her mind that she would achieve a social position which would give her immunity from being patronized by her equals. She had been hurt by the caste system at State, where she was considered socially inferior because she waited table to earn her way. So she had studiously prepared herself for what seemed to be an impregnable position—economically, socially, physically, culturally.

"It's taken a lot of work," Barbara said, "a lot of acting, and



quite a bit of lying. But I don't regret it. I've got where I want, and I'll do anything to stay where I am. Anything."

Gilmore watched Barbara nervously drain the last of her second brandy.

"Anything?" he asked.

"Anything." Barbara helped herself to a third brandy. "You ought to be sure of that since this afternoon."

"Because you kept your mouth shut, you mean, and let me take the rap for the story in the *Journal*?"

Barbara nodded. She drained her glass again. "It would have been so simple for me to point out that you had nothing to do with the break in Barzac shares; that it was the photos of Peggy—my photos—that touched off the explosion."

"What good would that have done?" Gilmore reached for the bottle himself.

"It might have meant your job. It still might. But that's not the half of it. Have you any idea why I wanted you to come here tonight, Gil? Why I've been letting down my back hair?"

Gilmore was surprised to see tears welling up into Barbara's eyes. "Why, no," he said, "unless, to coin a phrase, you're about to turn over a new leaf."

Barbara shook her head. One tear escaped to run down her cheek. She clasped the fingers of both hands about her brandy glass. "It's too late for that, Gil," she said. "I've done too damned good a job on myself. I thought that when I'd got to the point I wanted, I could have my cake and eat it, too. But I can't, Gil. This afternoon I discovered I was suffering from acute schizophrenia. So, before I slip back into my monolithic, monomaniac life, I——"

"Those are big words, Barbie."

"I know. I looked them up before you came, Gil. I wanted to be able to explain exactly how things were, because this will probably be the last time——"

"Barbie, are you blackmailing Evans?" Gilmore interrupted abruptly.

Barbara twisted the stem off her brandy glass. A sharp,

gleaming sliver gashed her palm. Ignoring the cut, she turned both palms down on the tablecloth.

"What makes you say that, Gil?"

"Something I heard this afternoon."

"About me?"

"No. About Evans. I think he's vulnerable. Do you know where the body is buried?"

"Why pick on me, Gil?"

"You seem to be the old man's darling—or at least the darling of the new administration. He—or they—have been pushing you ahead at an amazing rate. That reminds me, you'd better ask for a raise tomorrow. You really should be earning more money than your subordinates."

Barbara got up without a word and went into the bathroom. When she came back, she was inspecting an adhesive bandage she had applied to her gashed hand. All traces of tears had vanished. Her composure had been re-established.

"We were talking about Evans," she said calmly. "What am I supposed to be blackmailing him about?"

"Do you know Chris Froley?"

Barbara's eyes narrowed. "Is that the husband of the sexy little minx from the carrot line, the one who's been on the make for you, or vice versa?"

"Chris Froley is shop steward on the third floor, Main Building."

"We're talking about the same man. What about him?"

"Evans seems to have learned two weeks ago that Froley was a Commie. He says he wrote the F.B.I. about it. The F.B.I. has no record of Evans's letter, but it does have a record that Froley was a card-carrying Party member up to a year ago. I don't like the smell of the thing—Evans sitting around, waiting for the F.B.I. to answer a letter which was never received, while Froley goes on merrily working for Barzac."

"So what? Gene Evans puts on a great act, too, Gil. He plays the tough old reactionary, but he's really a softy at heart. He'd lean over backward to protect a liberal."

"I'm not talking about liberals, Barbie. I'm talking about a guy who's politically at war with his own country, who's been working in a plant with a war contract, turning out stuff for a war the guy has been instructed to disapprove and discourage. He works on the same floor where Army rations are being canned. The boss knows it, but nothing happens until a damned fine girl gets poisoned by those rations. Why?"

Barbara got herself another glass and toyed with the bottle. "Why do you think I have the answer to that question?" she asked.

"You have a talent for digging up wicked bits of information. I keep remembering what you did to me in New York. Who told you I married Zina out of gratitude for her having helped save me from being cashiered from the Army because I lost my uniform during a barroom brawl in the Kasbah in Algiers?"

"I'm not sure who told me. But it's true, isn't it?"

"The facts are true, although you're wrong about my motive for marriage. But when you repeated the story to the rich Chicagoan looking for a manager for the Northbank branch of his advertising agency, you didn't point out that the barroom brawl consisted of my being jumped by a dozen Arab thugs in the dark, and that I was cold sober at the time. It probably wouldn't have done any good anyhow, since the rich Chicagoan is one of the hundred thousand who voted the Prohibition ticket in the last presidential election, is chairman of three anti-saloon societies and contributes half a million dollars a year to a dozen others. But you know, of course, that your telling that very funny story to the man from Chicago cost me a twenty-thousand-a-year job?"

Barbara nodded. "You told me that when you fired me," she said. "It was a dirty trick and I deserved to be fired for it." She came around the table and put her hands on Gilmore's shoulders. "Do you know why I did it, Gil?"

"Ruthless ambition. You thought if you knifed me, you might charm yourself into the job."

"No, Gil. At first I told myself I was being jealous and vin-

dictive because you married Zina suddenly just when I was beginning to think I was falling in love with you myself. Maybe it was partly that. But the real reason was that I just didn't want you to go to Northbank. I didn't want you to leave New York. I didn't want you to go away from me."

Gilmore blinked incredulously. He stood up, reached for Barbara's hands on his shoulders.

"I didn't know then how important it was for you to get to Northbank," Barbara continued. "You never told me about your mother. How long has she been blind, Gil?"

"Since right after my old man died. A little after I got out of the Army."

"Gil, I'm tight, or I wouldn't be telling you all this. It doesn't pay to be frank about these things. For instance, a smart girl would never tell a guy she's been crazy about him for years. But I can tell you, Gil, because it doesn't matter any more now. When you went to Barzac, Gil, I worked like mad to wangle a publicity job with some other soup company. And then after I landed with Gold Label, I played all the angles to come along on this Barzac deal so I could be near you, in Northbank. You see, Gil—I thought I was still in love with you."

"And you're not?"

"Obviously not."

Gilmore's hands slipped down from Barbara's shoulders. He clasped her close, until he could feel the beat of her heart against him. He kissed her.

"Say that again," he said, when he had caught his breath. "Say it now. I dare you."

"Obviously not," Barbara repeated, looking him squarely in the eyes. With her forefinger she removed some of the lipstick from his mouth. "I let you down this afternoon, Gil. If I loved you, I wouldn't have let you take the rap for the *Journal* story. So obviously I'm much more interested in my job, than in you—or yours. Do you know how my mind worked this afternoon, Gil?"

"Sure," Gilmore said. "I was watching you. You were saying

to yourself, 'What a sap I am! Here I've been sweating like mad to get this bird's job away from him, just so I could be magnanimous about it when it came to a showdown, and I could give it back to him. And then I found I didn't want to give it back. I wanted it for myself. And furthermore, I didn't want to get tied up with a guy who was on his way out. Barbara Wall casts her electoral vote for Barbara Wall.'"

"You're so right, Gil."

"But one thing you didn't take into consideration. You didn't know you were going to be honest with yourself—and me. And that it would make all the difference in the world."

"I'm being honest with myself, because I don't want to leave any loose ends when you go out of here tonight. I want it to be a clean break—but clean. That's why I'm going to be honest with you, too. I haven't been yet, you know."

"You've been more honest than I've been tonight, Barbie. I haven't yet told you that I still love you."

"Don't, Gil. Don't make it any harder. You were right when you said I'd been—not blackmailing anybody, Gil. Let's call it horse-trading. But I'd been cutting corners and doing a little—well, you'd call it 'in-fighting'—to get what I wanted. Only it wasn't Mr. Evans."

"It was Bart Remington?"

"Bart wants to marry me, Gil. I don't mean he just says that, because I know it's probably a worn-out record with him—with a broken-down groove that repeats the same phrase over and over again. But—I can tell, Gil. I can have him when I want him."

"He's got money," Gilmore said. "And position. And influence. And a future. He's your kind of guy, Barbie. You must have decided that this afternoon, when you voted against Gilmore, who was on the way out. Congratulations, Barbie."

Gilmore drew back a few inches, waiting for the slap that never came. Instead, Barbara buried her face against his shoulder and burst into tears.

For a few seconds, Gilmore was surprised by the tears. For



a few more seconds he was embarrassed. Then he slipped his fingers under Barbara's chin, lifted her face and kissed her. He kissed her as he had not kissed anyone in years. He kissed her tear-damp eyes. He kissed her lips until they bled and he was breathless. He kissed the hollow of her throat until she was limp in his arms. He buried his face in the fragrance of her hair, tingling to the throbbing warmth of her body.

Then, somewhere far off, somewhere across Northbank, he heard a clock striking ten.

Gilmore tensed. He lifted his hand, listening to the last stroke of the distant chimes.

"What's the matter, Gil?"

"I've got to leave you, Barbie."

"Yes, of course you do." Barbara was completely calm. "We're being silly, aren't we, Gil?"

"I'm being silly. I don't want to leave you now, after I've just found you again."

"Then stay, Gil."

"I must go."

"Where, Gil? Is it about Peggy's—death?"

Gilmore nodded.

"Then don't go. I know you were fond of Peggy, but this doesn't really concern you, Gil."

"It concerns me very much," Gilmore said, "and it may very well concern you, too. I forgot to tell you that somebody tried to kill me this morning. I don't know who or why. But if, as I suspect, there is any connection with my quondam custody of *Emile*, I should think you'd share the curiosity that I'm going to try to satisfy tonight."

"Why not leave all that to the police, Gil?"

"I'm afraid my special source of information would clam up instantly in the presence of the law."

Barbara's sherry-colored eyes turned from *fino* to *oloroso*. "You're meeting Fancy-pants Froley?"

Gilmore did not reply.

"Don't go, Gil. Please. Let Dr. Coffee and Ritter or whatever his name is take care of everything."

"Look, Barbie." Gilmore spoke hesitantly. "The F.B.I. will probably be breathing on the back of my neck in a matter of hours. Because from where I sit, the poisoned rations and Peggy's death are all mixed up with *Émile* and Zina—and therefore me. If I were an F.B.I. agent looking for *Émile*, I don't think I'd believe the story that Zina's ex-husband lent the book to a girl named Barbara, and that somebody broke into Barbara's apartment to steal it. I think I can locate that book. I'd like to get it back."

Barbara looked at him silently, with great longing, as though she might never see him again. Then she kissed him, slowly, deliberately. "Come back, Gil," she said at last. "Tonight."

"You're going to marry Bart Remington. Remember?"

"Not tonight, Gil. Tonight I'm being honest—but only with myself. And with you. We have unfinished business, Gil." She pushed herself out of Gilmore's arms. "Good luck, Gil," she said. "I'll wait up."

## XVI

Gilmore approached the Anchor Bar in a state of strange excitement. Dinner with Barbara had left him both dismayed and elated, and he was not sure which emotion was false. Rationally, he knew he should dismally regret having admitted that his love for Barbara was a hardy perennial, only to find that her ego would never let it bloom. He knew, too, that he should be unhappy about Bart Remington. Yet he could not get rid of the feeling of triumph generated by her own admissions, and by her invitation to return.

He was making little progress in dispelling his confusion, possibly because of the last brandy, probably because of his imminent rendezvous with Frances Froley. At any rate, his meeting with Frankie promised a much simpler form of excitement. Frankie was certainly not the complicated personality that Barbara was. He knew exactly what he wanted from Frankie: the whereabouts of George Bayliss. And he thought he knew what she wanted from him in return. He was pretty sure he could bring off a successful exchange, even if he wasn't going to like it much.

As he left his parked car and walked toward the sickly-blue neon anchor flashing on and off through the warm river mists, he seemed to see an anchor fast on the bottom, its flukes deep in ooze, its shank leaning wearily against the murky current, surrounded by silent, crawling things. Below the winking sign, the dim windows of the Anchor Bar glared dully at the waterfront, impervious to the rubies and emeralds of the night river traffic, even to the diamond clusters gleaming from the mastheads of vessels towing. The hoot of tugs that provided a raucous obligato to the clink of glasses was no more raucous than the hoots of bargemen, stevedores and river roustabouts who

squinted across their lifeless beers at the wrestlers flickering on the Anchor's television screen.

Gilmore had scarcely passed the swinging doors of the Anchor when he was seized with still another feeling—the feeling that he was walking into a trap. A sudden silence settled over the place as he walked in. Conversation stopped in midsentence as men turned to stare at the newcomer who was not only a stranger to the bar, but a stranger to the milieu, a man not of their breed. Men stood with glasses poised, not drinking, not looking at Gilmore but very much aware of his presence. Only the one-eyed bartender looked at him, but he, too, seemed to be waiting, waiting. . . .

Gilmore didn't like the smell of the place—the rich, warm blend of animal odors and the stale scent of dead tobacco smoke and spilled beer. The effluvia of men who work with their hands, the strong male smell of August sweat and work clothes, was an honest reek, but it was tainted by the malignant breath of some vague evil.

A single overhead ceiling fan spun feebly without stirring up the slightest eddy in the hot, rank, blue air. Peering through the acrid haze, Gilmore spotted Frankie Froley in a booth far in the rear of the barroom. She was alone. Gilmore walked quickly toward her, and life at the bar began again with a little flurry of sound, of interrupted sentences resumed, of the clink of glasses.

"Gil, angel! I thought you weren't coming."

Gilmore muttered a few words of excuse, ignored the invitation of the half-pouting lips, and sat down opposite Frankie. She was dressed, or overdressed, like something out of early Eugene O'Neill. Her dress was a confection of candy-pink taffeta, with darker pink patches under her arms, and too many bows and rhinestone clips. She wore patent-leather slippers, huge gypsy earrings, and enough make-up for an hour's television show. But her elemental appeal somehow survived all the trappings.

"Terrific. Makes you look more beautiful than ever," Gil-

more said. Frankie giggled. "You're tight as a tick, Frankie."

"You kept me waiting, honey. I couldn't just sit here without drinking anything. I had a few short beers, is all."

"You picked an elegant dive to wait in. Why'd you pick a joint like this?"

"Chris never comes here," Frankie said.

That was an advantage, Gilmore mused, although there must be sweeter-smelling places that Chris didn't frequent. He looked at Frankie curiously, wondering what was going on in her mind and how long it was going to take him to find out. She returned his stare with unblinking frankness.

"Does George Bayliss come here?" Gilmore asked abruptly.

"Him!" Frankie made a face, then lowered her long, dark lashes. "Why do we have to talk about him?"

"Where is he, Frankie?"

"I don't know."

"You said if I wanted to know what happened to Bayliss I'd better come to the Anchor at ten tonight."

"Did I say that?" She smiled, but it was a prop smile. "You ought to wash my mouth out with soap, Gil."

"Let's get out of here," Gilmore said.

Frankie leaned across the table until her lips almost touched his. "Gil, you don't like me any more," she said plaintively.

"I'm mad about you, Frankie. I told you so this afternoon. But I've got things on my mind."

"Didn't you like it when you kissed me the other night? I mean, you really do like me, don't you? You didn't get up this thing the other night, the Carrot Queen thing, just so—?" Her voice died.

"Just so what?"

Frankie waved away the question with a gesture that upset her glass. A finger of spilled liquid reached across the table as though beckoning to Gilmore. "Order me another drink, Gil. Rye and ginger. No more beer. Did Chris really say he'd kill you the other night?"

"He did. And I have a pretty good hunch that he's tried to



make good twice since then. You have a jealous husband, Frankie."

"Pooh!" said Frankie. "I'd like another rye and ginger, waiter."

"A small beer for me," Gilmore said.

"Chris isn't jealous of anybody. He thinks he can have any woman he wants, and maybe he can. He's been to bed with half the girls in the local. He's not jealous of me."

"Don't you think Chris cracked me in the eye, then?"

"Maybe," Frankie said. "But he wouldn't do that because he was jealous of me. He might, if he thought *I* was jealous of *him*!"

Gilmore picked up the beer the waiter brought and downed it at one gulp. He frowned. "Say that again," he said. "The first time it didn't make sense."

"It makes sense, all right. Chris doesn't like me making all that extra money and getting so much publicity. He always says he'll break my neck if I get too damn' independent and start free-wheeling. He thinks maybe I'm getting sweet on you just to get even with him for two-timing me with all those other girls. I guess he's afraid I might talk in my sleep or something and spill the beans."

"What beans?" Gilmore asked.

"I don't really talk in my sleep." Frankie's eyelashes worked overtime to fan away any possible suggestion of such a waste of time in bed. "So of course I wouldn't really spill any beans."

"Naturally." Gilmore hesitated. The picture was becoming clearer. "Does Chris know how Peggy Bayliss came to die?"

"Chris?" Frankie shrugged. "Pooh! Why should he? She was out of his class."

"I thought maybe George Bayliss told him," Gilmore said.

Frankie stuck her tongue into her highball. She looked at Gilmore through the fringes of her long lashes. After a slight pause she asked: "Did you get fired yet, Gil?"

"Not quite. Who told you I was going to get fired?"

"I heard. When you get fired, let's go to Hollywood. The two of us. And why wait, anyhow? Let's go now."

"Not tonight, Frankie."

"The other night you said I belonged in Hollywood. You said as soon as the newsreels came out, the Hollywood talent scouts would make a beeline for Northbank. Let's go meet them half-way. You know I'd go with you, Gil. Anywhere. I like you an awful lot. And you said that with my legs and my face, I'd be a cinch for Hollywood."

Gilmore said: "You're a cute kid, Frankie." She was, too. She was also smarter than her present line would indicate. She couldn't possibly be dumb enough to think a newsreel clip was an open-sesame for movie stardom. She must know that she made the newsreels in Northbank because she could peel carrots faster than anyone west of Camden, New Jersey, but that in Hollywood she'd be lucky to make car-hop in a big-league drive-in. Her game was simple. And two could play . . .

She stretched her hands across the table and Gilmore took them. They were good hands—soft and graceful and well-cared-for. They were, Gilmore thought incongruously, a testimonial to Barzac's amazing paternalism. Barzac's women workers didn't have to worry about the occupational hazards of ugly hands from peeling carrots or cleaning chickens or sorting rice. Feminine hands that worked for Barzac got free manicures regularly. . . .

Gilmore squeezed the hands and said:

"Tell me about *Émile*, Frankie."

Frankie's hands jerked back as from a hot stove.

"Émile?" Her echo was like a cry of pain. Her face seemed suddenly to decompose into its component features, coarse features, slack with naked fear. Her frightened eyes looked right through Gilmore—or was it over his shoulder?

Gilmore sprang up. He turned to stare into the expressionless mask of the one-eyed bartender.

"You call me?" the bartender asked. Both his hands were hidden under his apron.

"No," Gilmore said. Frankie, fishy-eyed, was fumbling in her handbag. She dropped her compact.

"Funny," the bartender said. "I could've sworn I heard my name."

"What is your name?" Gilmore asked. He glanced at Frankie. She was making clumsy gestures with her lipstick. The bartender's hands were moving under his apron.

"Ed Neal," said the bartender. "Everybody knows I'm Ed Neal."

"Okay, Ed. Let's have the check."

"It's two twenny." The bartender glared.

Gilmore dropped money on the table and glared back. He pulled Frankie to her feet, and waited until the bartender retreated.

Their exit loosed the same flood of sullen silence that had greeted his entrance. The sweating line of men at the bar abandoned talk and drink to stare at the departing couple. The bartender's one eye gleamed like the point of an icepick. Frankie Froley's heels beat out a sinister tattoo on the linoleum as they ran the silent gantlet of hostile glances.

Once outside, even the hot night seemed cool to Gilmore. He breathed deeply, took Frankie's arm, and headed for the corner where he had parked his car.

When he jabbed his key into the door lock, she slid her arm around his neck. "Where are we going, Gil?"

"To call on George Bayliss."

"Pooh!" Frankie's head-chancery tightened. She moved her cheek closer. "I know lots of better things to do than chasing after Bayliss. Besides, I don't know where he is."

Gilmore's arms and hands came to grips with the physical facts of Frankie Froley. She sensed his involuntary response and snuggled closer. Her closeness was warm and exciting, but cold reality was still closer. He pushed down the door handle with his elbow, turned, and boosted Frankie into the car. "Let's look for him," he said.

He walked around the car, slid under the wheel, and stepped

on the starter. The engine purred into action. He put the car in gear and pulled away from the curb. "Tell me where to go," he said.

"I don't know where Bayliss is, Gil. 'Honest."

"Okay. Then I'll take you home."

"Good." Frankie sighed happily. "I was hoping you'd take me home with you."

"Home to your husband," Gilmore corrected.

Frankie, who had begun to cuddle against him, suddenly stiffened. Then she went limp again, and a shiver ran through her. She leaned her head against him until he felt her hair on his cheek and her breath against his throat. "No, Gil. Please! I don't want to go home to Chris tonight. I can't. Honest!"

"Is Chris with George Bayliss?" Gilmore swung his car around a corner, heading in the general direction of the Froley domicile.

"I don't know, Gil. Really, I don't."

"It's up to you, Frankie."

Gilmore drove in silence for a moment, then turned into the street that led to the Froley house.

"Stop, Gil! Please. Stop here."

Gilmore pulled over and set his brakes, but he did not cut the ignition. "Okay, Frankie, let's talk turkey," he said, "without cranberries. You want something from me. Come on, Frankie, give. What do you want?"

"I've already told you, Gil. I want to get away from here. I want to get away from Northbank. I want to get away from carrots. I'm sick of the whole business, and I want to get out. Help me, Gil."

"And why should I help you, Frankie?" Gilmore purred. The purr produced an appropriate kitten reaction.

"Because—because I love you, Gil."

Gilmore slipped his arms around Frankie's shoulders. He kissed her. With a little sigh of surrender, she settled into his embrace. His hands slid up behind her head. As he pressed her

against his lips, his fingers entwined themselves in her hair. He twisted.

"Ow!" Frankie disengaged quickly. "Gil, you're hurting me."

Gilmore tightened his twisting grip.

"Gil, what are you doing? What's the matter, Gil?"

"You're such a liar, Frankie," Gilmore said.

"Stop! Stop it, Gil! What's wrong? What do you want me to do?"

"Tell me the straight story, Frankie."

"But I've told you the truth. Honest."

"Maybe you have, in a way." Gilmore let go of Frankie's hair. His fingers caressed her throat. "But you haven't told me enough. You didn't tell me, for instance, that Chris was a Commie. Didn't Chris say to you, 'This Carrot Queen stuff is all horse-feathers. Gilmore is playing up to you just to try to pump you about me. Well, it works both ways. You make a heavy play for him and find out what's in his belly. He's probably a company spy or worse. For my money, he's a cop. So make like a two-timing wife. Then, if anything has to happen to Gilmore, it'll just be a case of the unwritten law.' Wasn't that the story?"

"I told you," Frankie said, "that I was going to walk out on Chris."

"That's part two. After you saw the pictures in the papers and the newsreel clips, you began to think maybe I was on the level after all. And then this afternoon you must have found out that Chris was really in trouble, and there was no good missing a chance to get out from under. Probably Chris got word to you not to go home. Probably the police are camped on your doorstep. That's why you were so jittery when I wanted to take you home a minute ago. Right?"

"I'm afraid to go home. I'm afraid of Chris—of everything. I want to get away—anywhere. I thought about it yesterday already, and took my money out of the bank. Chris found it and took it away from me."

"Where would you go, Frankie?"



"I have a sister in New York."

"I'll make a deal with you," Gilmore said. "I'll risk the Mann Act and being an accomplice after the fact— Are you a fugitive from justice?"

"I haven't done anything, Gil."

"All right. Then I'll stake you to a ticket to New York. I'll even drive you to the airport—if you'll lead me to *Émile*."

"I can't, Gil. I don't know anything about Emile. I don't even know who he is."

"Then why the big double-take back there at the Anchor when I mentioned *Émile*?"

"I'd heard Chris mention the name. Somebody called Emile has been phoning him."

Gilmore weighed the credibility of this statement. He said: "I'll settle for Bayliss, then. I'll put you on a plane tonight, if you lead me to Bayliss. Can you?"

"I think so." She kissed him on the cheek. "Turn around and drive straight ahead till I tell you."

As Gilmore released his brakes, she continued, "I wasn't trying to hold out on you. You were such a good friend of poor Peggy's, I thought you knew about Bayliss. Really, didn't you know he's been working for Barzac this last week?"

"Barzac?" Gilmore gave Frankie a startled look, and immediately jammed on his brakes to avoid a mail truck that came careening out of a side street. "Here in Northbank?"

"In the tomato operation," Frankie said.

Of course. Ritter had said Peggy's so-called long-distance call from her ex-husband the day before she died had not been recorded by the Barzac exchange. It had been a local call wearing false whiskers. Bayliss had not gone back to Chicago the night Gilmore had found him in his garage.

"How did you know this?" Gilmore asked. "Has Chris been seeing Bayliss?"

"They've had their heads together. I don't know what about, though. Turn left here."

"Was Bayliss at your place tonight?"

"I doubt it. They always meet some place else. Turn right at the corner and then straight ahead."

They were leaving the pleasantly proletarian part of Northbank—a quarter that had been settled by factory workers when property was cheap, when building costs were not astronomical, and a man could keep up payments on both a house and a car if his wife put in a few weeks at the cannery now and then when the seasonal crops were coming in. They left the streets of little lawns and trees and white picket fences. The streets ahead were badly lighted and lined with sagging, lop-sided, frame houses that even in the darkness showed their need for paint—a miserable slum district whose shanties would barely pay the taxes until they collapsed of senile decay

"Stop here," Frankie said. "Right here, before you get to that street light. I don't want anybody to see me."

"Aren't you getting out with me?"

"I'd rather stay in the car. It's just around the corner. Look, Gil. Maybe I won't be able to get away tonight. Maybe I won't be able to get my clothes. If I call you later, or maybe in the morning, will you meet me somewhere?"

"Anywhere," Gilmore said. "Where's the house?"

"Right around the corner, the second house on the near side of the street. There's a sign in the front window that says 'Rooms,' but don't ring the bell, because I don't know what name Bayliss gave the landlady."

"How do you know he lives here, then?"

"I followed Chris out here the other night in a taxi. I thought he had a date with that blonde hussy he used to be sweet on; you know, the bitch from the fourth-floor can line. Well, I followed Chris and I saw him take a little path that goes around the left side of the house. You pass a lilac bush, and you come to a side door that opens right into Bayliss's room. I saw Chris go in the door, and I looked through the window and saw him inside talking to Bayliss. That's all I can tell you."

"That's enough," Gilmore said, "if it's true."

"See for yourself, Gil. I'll wait in the car. I don't want anybody to know I brought you here."

Gilmore hesitated, but not long. There was only one way to check the truth of Frankie's story. He got out of the car. "Right back," he said.

When he reached the corner, he stopped. He thought he had heard the rapid click of high heels on pavement. He turned his head.

Peering into the darkness, he saw Frankie Froley running down the street in the opposite direction. As she disappeared into the night, he pondered going after her. He could probably catch up with her without too much trouble, but to what end? He would hear from her soon enough—too soon, very likely. Unless, of course, she had set the trap and was disappearing for good.

Gilmore drew a deep breath and continued his way to the second house from the corner.

## XVII

Gilmore saw the rooms-for-rent sign in the front window, as Frankie had predicted. He also found the path she had described at the left of the house, as well as the tall lilac bush about thirty feet down the path from the cracked and undulating sidewalk.

As he started down the path, he saw a light gleaming through the thick foliage of the lilac. He slowed his pace, moved toward the lilac with steps that were groping and cautious—but not cautious enough.

His knee banged against a trash barrel invisible in the darkness. The barrel upset with a tinny clatter of empty cans. The light behind the lilac winked out.

Gilmore froze in his tracks. The furious thumping of his heart in his throat seemed to echo the cowbell rhythm of the spilled cans—probably Barzac cans, he told himself ironically. He remained motionless for an everlasting half minute. Then he groped with an exploratory foot, seeking a spot on which he might step without setting off another tin-can alarm.

After only one faint metallic murmur which in Gilmore's ears seemed to reverberate like a fire gong, but which produced no visible reaction beyond the lilac, he negotiated the remaining distance to the side door without incident. For another long moment he stood several feet from the threshold, listening, staring at the door, watching the glint of starlight on the dark pane of the adjoining window. He heard no sound, saw no sign of life. Yet the fact that a light had gone out suddenly when he overturned the trash barrel was hardly reassuring. Another minute ticked by while he hesitated, wondering if he should knock. Then, impulsively, he grasped the knob, twisted, pushed. The door swung inward.

Quickly, so as not to present a tempting silhouette, Gilmore crossed the threshold and stepped briskly to the left. Instantly someone kicked the door shut.

The silence of the next few seconds was broken only by the renewed pounding of Gilmore's heart, again beating in his throat. Then a man's voice boomed peremptorily through the darkness: "Get your hands up! Keep 'em high, or I'll let you have it."

Gilmore swallowed twice before he could disentangle his heart from his vocal cords long enough to say: "Skip the theatrics, Bayliss. This is a friendly——"

Brilliance sprayed into Gilmore's eyes, and he blinked. The voice behind the flashlight ordered: "Get those hands up—in a hurry."

Then a second male voice, one that was pleasantly familiar, said: "Great stars! It's Gilmore, Max."

An overhead light blazed on, and Gilmore saw Lieutenant Max Ritter facing him with a police positive in one hand and a flashlight in the other. Beyond Ritter, Dr. Coffee stood with one hand on the light switch.

"What the hell are you doing here?" the detective demanded.

"You take the words out of my mouth," Gilmore replied.

"You've been holding out on us," Ritter said. "You did know where Bayliss lived."

"I just found out five minutes ago."

"Why didn't you tell us he's been working at Barzac?"

"I only found *that* out ten minutes ago," Gilmore said. "Do you mind if I sit down? My knees are still a little overcome by your cordial reception."

"Put up your gun, Max," Dr. Coffee said. "I don't think you'll need it right now."

"I know it's none of my business, Ritter," Gilmore went on, "but how did you find out that Bayliss lived here?"

"We weren't sure until you give us the friendly greeting when you come in," Ritter said.



"But you did dig up the address, and that's smart work. Isn't Bayliss using a phony name?"

"He is. What's this guy look like, anyhow?"

"He's about my height, only thinner," Gilmore said. "He's got black, bushy hair and small, intense eyes very close together. I never noticed what color his eyes are, except they're dark like his jowls."

"Is he a Commie?"

"Possibly. I used to think he was at least a fellow traveler. He's the dark, thin, earnest type—a little like you, Ritter, only smaller—and he used to be always fighting for some idealistic cause or other. Of course, since the matter of foreign policy has become part of the picture——"

"Is this him?" Ritter interrupted. He drew a celluloid identification badge from his pocket. It was one of the standard badges that Barzac employes wore to get past the plant guards.

Gilmore looked at the photograph on the badge, and at the name "Baynard George" underneath the photo.

"That's Bayliss," he said.

"Don't you folks over at Barzac have any better security check than that—hiring a guy under a phony name without digging around a little?" the detective asked.

Gilmore explained that while the Personnel Department at Barzac was like a minor-league Gestapo when it came to investigating applicants for permanent employment, the same thoroughness was impossible for the temporary workers during the tomato season. From mid-July to mid-September, Barzac took on nearly three thousand extra hands, which was a seventy-five per cent increase over its regular payroll. Two entire plants of the Barzac cannery operated only during the tomato season, but they ran day and night for two months to take care of the ripening harvest. Naturally, with such a heavy demand for transient labor, the personnel people couldn't be too particular. . . .

"I'd still like to know," Gilmore concluded, "how you spotted

Bayliss, under an assumed name, among nearly three thousand people."

"It was Doc Coffee's idea," Ritter said.

"Max is too modest," the pathologist said. "He did the work. All I did was wonder a little about that phone call Peggy Bayliss got from her ex-husband the day before she died. Max says it was a local call, but Bayliss tried to make his ex-wife think he was calling from Chicago. Why? Well, it seemed to me that the most likely possibility was that he was up to some monkey business pretty close at hand, where Peggy might come across him, and he didn't want her to know he was in Northbank. The closest place, of course, would be the Barzac plant itself, so I suggested to Max that he run over there and see if there was anything he could pick up in the list of people hired during the last week."

"There was three hundred and nineteen new people put on the payroll during the past week, all of 'em in tomatoes," Max Ritter said. "But only eighty-two is men, so that simplifies things a little. Then I remember that Bayliss didn't show up at the funeral this morning, and that gives me an idea of how to chop things down still more. I drop around at the royal palace to have a few words with one of your kingpins, this guy Remington, and he sends me to Captain Kavlik of the Guard Force. Kavlik goes over the absentee list with me and we find this badge that this guy Baynard George is supposed to pick up yesterday, only he don't come to work for two days. Funny thing, but when a guy takes a phony name he usually tries to hang on to part of his old one, like he's afraid to lose part of his soul. Sometimes he keeps his old initials, sometimes he just changes syllables around. So George Bayliss could be Baynard George easy enough. George comes on the payroll just six days ago, and he don't come to work for two days—since Peggy Bayliss dies. So it all fits. I take this guy George's badge, which gives me a photo, and I get his address from Kavlick. Then I pick up Doc Coffee and we come on out here. Now tell me how *you* got here?"

"I'd rather not reveal my source of information," Gilmore said, "unless it's absolutely necessary."

"It ain't necessary," Ritter grinned. "I can guess. But you better wash the lipstick off your cheek, anyhow. It makes a better impression when you're trying to hide a lady's name. It also might keep you from getting another black eye."

"Max has finally decided to believe your booby-trap story," Dr. Coffee said.

"Yeah," the detective admitted. "Look what we found here." He crossed the room and opened a closet door. The smell of camphor assailed Gilmore's nostrils. Ritter shone his flashlight down on a small box on the closet floor. The box was packed with long, thin, yellow-brown cylinders. "Dynamite," Ritter said. "There's three more sticks in the dresser drawer, with fuses attached. There's also some percussion caps in the drawer."

"Does dynamite usually stink of camphor?" Gilmore asked.

"That's something I got to find out," Ritter said. "It's a little off my beat."

"I think the smell of camphor may prove to be a valuable piece of our puzzle," Dr. Coffee said.

"Anyhow, the dynamite proves one thing. We find it in Bayliss's closet and we find Froley's prints on the car that Gilmore says had dynamite trimmings this morning. So the dynamite proves Bayliss and Froley know each other."

"Are you sure Froley didn't rent this room himself, just to store the dynamite?" Gilmore asked.

"The landlady recognizes the picture on Baynard George's badge," the detective replied. "She says he rents the room six days ago and pays two weeks in advance. She says she sees him come in today about noon with a package under his arm. He stays in his room all afternoon, beating on a portable typewriter he brings when he checks in. When the landlady goes out to do her shopping for supper, she hears the typewriter still going. When she comes back, it's stopped. And I guess the bird has flown the coop for good, because when the Doc and I get here

tonight, there's no typewriter and no clothes. Just the Nobel candy-sticks in the closet, and the stuff in the dresser."

"And Gilmore, coming to call at midnight."

"And Gilmore," Ritter echoed, "with lipstick on his cheek and a secret that wild horses can't tear from his bosom. This Mrs. Froley must sure be in love with you to tip you off on her husband's pal's hideout."

"I didn't say Mrs. Froley gave me this address."

"No, and I didn't say I wasn't going to book you as an accomplice after the fact."

"What fact?" Gilmore asked sweetly.

Ritter nodded to Dr. Coffee. "The Doc is working on that," he said. "I'll let you know just what kind of homicide it is when we get around to it."

"I was working on it before Dr. Coffee was," Gilmore said. "Peggy Bayliss was all neatly signed out with a natural-causes death certificate. She would have been quietly buried if I hadn't brought Dr. Coffee into the case."

"I've pointed that out to Max," the pathologist said.

"But I'm still working on you," Ritter insisted.

"Why don't you work on Froley?" Gilmore asked. "If you're so sure that Bayliss and Froley are buddies and you're looking for Bayliss, why don't you put a tail on Froley?"

"I would," Ritter said, "if I could spot him. Nobody sees him since the funeral. He don't report for work today, and he ain't home. I got a guy camped out in his yard since I find his prints on your car."

"Ritter," Gilmore said, "to spare your boys eye-strain and brain-fag, I'd better give you my itinerary for the next twelve hours—unless you're going to put me in irons right now."

"I guess I can put my hands on you when I want you," Ritter said. Then he added, without smiling: "Unless somebody else lays hands on you first."

## XVIII

It was after midnight when Gilmore got back to Barbara Wall's apartment house. He had thought of phoning from along the way, to make sure she was still up, but every drug store he passed was closed. Anyhow she had insisted he come back, no matter how late.

He must have set some sort of record for quick-change of moods tonight, he mused as he drove through the night-quiet streets. He'd been changing moods much as an imitator on the amateur hour changes hats. There had been three for Barbara alone, two for Frankie Froley (still subject to change), and then the surprise at finding Ritter and Dr. Coffee in Bayliss's room. He managed to banish them all, like the smell of camphor that had long clung to his nostrils, as he savored the pleasant anticipation of his rendezvous with Barbara. It was a pity that the moment he had been longing for so long, consciously and subconsciously, should finally come in the midst of such a crowded night.

Barbara opened the door almost instantly. She was wearing a peacock-blue negligee that fit her like a bathing suit. A faint scent of musk shimmered in the doorway for a brief instant, then vanished, leaving an ominous chill. Her honey-gold hair hung down to her half-bare shoulders and the light behind her made a halo about her erect head. But if Barbara had let her hair down, she had her guard up. Her posture, as she stood with one hand on the doorknob, was rigid if not hostile. Her amber eyes were not unfriendly, but neither were they inviting. So Gilmore, instead of springing across the threshold with arms outstretched, stood motionless, his arms at his sides.

"Come in, Gil." Her voice was impersonal, ice cold. "I'd almost given you up."



She opened the door wider, and Gilmore understood why the temperature had dropped. Bart Remington was sitting at the other side of the room, a sweating glass in his hand. He had crossed his legs carefully so as not to spoil the knife creases in his expensive-looking dove-gray tropical worsted trousers, but somehow he did not seem quite his dapper self. His polka-dot bow tie was slightly askew, his sleek blond hair was not as sleek as usual, and he was generally ill at ease.

Gilmore came in and sat down.

"I've been phoning all over town tonight, Gilmore, trying to locate you," Remington said. "I finally thought of calling Barbara. She told me you were coming by for a nightcap so I dropped in to intercept you. I hope you don't mind."

"Glad to see you," Gilmore lied. "What's up?"

"That police detective, Lieutenant Ritter, came to see me at dinnertime. He seems to think Peggy Bayliss's ex-husband might be working at our plant. Sounds like a screwy idea, but I told him how he might go about tracing him."

"Ritter told me he was trying to get a line on Bayliss," Gilmore said. "Is that what you were trying to reach me about?"

Remington shook his head. "No, it's something else. Have you been listening to the radio tonight?"

"Not to speak of," Gilmore said.

"Gil's been very busy," Barbara added.

"Or have you by any chance spoken to Quirk tonight? Well, Quirk phoned me about you early this evening. I don't know what you did to those reporters at the funeral this morning, but they're after your scalp. At least the *Tribune* is. They've been trying to reach Evans, but the Old Man won't accept any calls from anybody. He's in a state."

"You'll have a drink, won't you, Gil?" Barbara interrupted.

"The usual," Gilmore said, and immediately wished he hadn't. Why was he showing off in front of Remington, impressing him with the fact that Barbara would know his favorite tippie?

"Well, the *Tribune* man finally got hold of Quirk," Remington continued. "He wanted to know if it was true that Bob

Gilmore was married to a Moroccan dancer named Zina. Quirk said he didn't know, but he'd check. So Quirk called me——"

"Why all this sudden interest in my matrimonial past?" Gilmore asked.

"Well, the story was on the radio tonight about this Moroccan girl, this dancer who goes by the professional name of Zina, and how she was to testify before this Senate committee—you know, Senator What's-his-name's investigation. Seems she was going to Washington with a lot of sensational dope on Commies in this country. She was going to bring along some French book that would be damning evidence. She was due in Washington yesterday, the radio said, only she didn't show up. She disappeared from Chicago where she was, and the Senator says he suspects foul play.

"Well, when Quirk called me and said the *Tribune* claims that this Zina is really Mrs. Robert Gilmore, I thought I'd better try to tip you off so you can get a denial to the *Tribune* before the paper goes to press."

Gilmore looked at Barbara who was bringing him a bourbon and water. Barbara returned his inquisitive stare with a completely blank expression. She handed him the glass.

"Thanks," Gilmore said. "But I can't very well give the *Tribune* a denial because the story's true. Or at least it was true for a few weeks some years ago."

Remington pursed his lips solemnly. He asked: "Do you know where the lady is now?"

"I haven't seen her since two weeks after I married her—so she could be legally admitted to the United States as the wife of a citizen. It was a mistaken bit of chivalry, apparently, unless it's going to pay off for the Senate investigation."

Remington whistled softly. "The Old Man's going to love that," he said. "But that's something you'll have to sweat out yourself. That's not really what I trailed you to Barbara's for. After I got Quirk's call, I thought I'd better relay the message personally. I don't like to discuss matters like that over the

phone. They're tapping telephones like sugar maples these days, and you can never tell."

"Do you think my line is tapped?" Gilmore asked.

"I wouldn't know," Remington answered. "But anyway, I drove over to your house to see if you were home. When I stopped at your curb, I saw a man sitting on your front steps. I thought it was you, so I spoke to him. He got up and started to run. I called after him, but he didn't answer. He ran around to the back of your house and disappeared through the garden. I suppose I should have followed him, but I was so surprised, that I didn't even get out of the car."

"Who was it?" Gilmore asked.

"It was pretty dark, of course, and I couldn't be sure. But I'd almost swear it was Chris Froley. Have you run into Froley anywhere tonight?"

"No," Gilmore said.

"Gil's much more interested in Mrs. Froley," Barbara said tartly. "You did see her tonight, didn't you, Gil?"

"I saw her. She's scared to death of her husband. Or for her husband. I'm not sure which."

"*You* ought to be scared." Remington looked pointedly at the greenish purple blur under Gilmore's left eye. "You're a nervy guy, Gilmore. Mrs. F. is a dish, all right, but I don't know that *I'd* recommend getting hot pants over the wife of a maniac. Is it true that he threatened to kill you?"

Gilmore flushed. "Damn it, Remington, it's none of your business, but my interest in Frances Froley is not even faintly lecherous. The Carrot Queen stunt was purely for dear old Barzac, and so was my meeting with her tonight. My job is to keep the name of Barzac sweet and clean, and this business of the poisoned rations and Peggy Bayliss's death has stunk up the shop, but good. I'm doing my damndest to unstink it, and I resent your innuendoes. I saw Frances Froley tonight because I thought she might be useful. I thought she'd tell me things she wouldn't tell the cops."

"About Chris being a Commie, you mean?"

"So you do know that."

Remington nodded. "That police lieutenant told me about it early this evening," he said. "He told me the F.B.I. never got the letter Evans says he wrote about it. I can't understand it. Why would Evans try to cover up a thing like that? I know the Old Man was tying himself in knots to keep from antagonizing the union, but he wouldn't let the company in for something like this, with a war contract in the works. Do you think this poisoning is all a Communist plot?"

"Possibly," Gilmore admitted.

"Then that makes Froley even more dangerous for you," Remington said. "He was probably laying for you when I saw him at your house tonight. Have you got a gun, Gilmore?"

"I've got the usual liberated Luger in my dresser drawer, but I've got no reason to pack it around in a shoulder holster. Besides I don't have a permit."

"You've got plenty reason," Remington said. "And when a screwball is out gunning for you, the hell with the permit."

"Why should Froley be gunning for me?" Gilmore decided he wouldn't tell Remington about the dynamite and Froley's prints on his car. He wanted to hear the production manager's own theories.

"You just told us why. You've been trying to pump Frances Froley and her husband doesn't like any of it. He's tried to warn you off the course, but you won't warn. So he's using sterner methods. He's not going to take a chance of his wife being so drooly over you that she'll tell where the body's buried."

"What body?" Gilmore asked.

"Let's say Froley doesn't know the word's gone out that he's a Red. Let's say he thinks it's still a secret and he wants to keep it that way."

"Do you think Froley poisoned the rations?"

"Could be." Remington took a long swig of his drink and put the glass down on the television console, three inches away from the copper coaster. Barbara got up and set the glass on



the coaster. Remington didn't notice her. He said: "It's a little out of my line, though. I'd rather let the police figure that one."

"Anyhow, I don't think Froley's very dangerous," Gilmore said, "if he ran when he saw you tonight."

"Don't kid yourself, Gilmore," Remington said. "He ran when he heard my voice because he recognized it was *me*. It's *you* he was laying for. He thought I wouldn't recognize him in the dark, so he ran for it. Why? Because he wanted to come back and wait for you. Look, Gilmore, I've got a gun in my car. When we go down, I'll let you take it for tonight. You can never tell."

"I won't need a gun. I always wear a bullet-proof vest."

"Stop clowning," Barbara said, "because I don't think this is very funny. Take Bart's gun, Gil."

Something about Barbara's solemnity disturbed Gilmore. He asked: "What makes you think Froley will come back, Remington?"

"I don't know he's even gone," Remington said. "As far as I know, he's still hiding in your back garden. I didn't get out of the car to follow him."

"How long ago was this?"

"Just before I came here. Maybe half an hour ago."

"Make him take your gun, Bart," Barbara insisted. "Tell him he doesn't have to do any fire-walking to convince us he's a brave lad."

"Okay, okay. I'll borrow your gun, Remington, and a pair of rubbers, too, if you've got an extra pair."

Barbara took a deep breath. Her chest expansion was most attractive beneath the taut silk of her negligee. She turned to inspect Remington's empty glass.

"Another drink, Bart?" she asked.

"No, thanks. I've had plenty. I'll be running along. It's late."

Gilmore waited for Barbara to offer him another drink. He remained seated while Remington got up. He waggled his empty glass ostentatiously, but nothing happened.

"Well," he said. As soon as he got to his feet Barbara came



over to put her hand on his shoulder. It was not a love tap, either. It was a gentle but firm push in the direction of the door. There was no invitation in her eyes.

"Goodnight, you two gorgeous creatures," she said, with a yawn. "Go straight home and don't talk to strangers."

They didn't even talk to each other going down in the elevator.

When they reached the sidewalk, Gilmore said: "You're not really serious about that gun, are you, Remington?"

"Deadly serious," Remington said. "This is really a thing we've got into, Gilmore, and you know it. I get goose-pimples whenever I think that a cold-blooded murderer's been operating right under our noses. And I don't think his blood is going to get any warmer in your electric presence, Gilmore. That's why I think you're a fool to run around unarmed."

"I thought maybe you offered me the gun," Gilmore said, "so I'd have to come downstairs with you to get it. Then you wouldn't have to worry about my out-sitting you tonight with Barbara."

Remington leaned against the shiny fender of his new Cadillac convertible and laughed heartily. "That's a good one," he said. "Only I'm not clever enough to have thought it up. Anyhow I know you and Barbara are old friends and I wouldn't dream of trying to break up your evening. Why don't you take my gun and then go back upstairs and finish your nightcap or tête-à-tête or whatever you came over for?"

"Thanks," said Gilmore, "but I don't think I'd be welcome. Barbara's tired."

Remington opened the door of his car and unlocked the glove compartment. "Take the gun anyhow," he said.

"Thanks," said Gilmore, "but I don't think I will."

"Don't be a sap."

"That's part of my charm," Gilmore said. "I've always been a sap of sorts and I rather like it. Besides, I'm not a very good shot, and I'd probably shoot off two or three fingers if I ever had to use your gun."

Remington weighed the .38 automatic in his hand for a moment, then replaced it in the glove compartment. "Suit yourself," he said. "It'll be your funeral this time."

"Goodnight," Gilmore said. "See you in the morning."

"I hope so," Remington said. "I sincerely hope so."

Gilmore drove slowly past his own house, then made a U-turn so that his headlights would sweep the front lawn, the porch, the grape arbor that led to the garden in back, the garage. Everything was apparently serene. Nobody was sitting on the front steps, and the garage doors were open, as he had left them that morning.

Before he switched off his headlights, however, he got out his flashlight as a weapon of self-defense. It was not as good as a .38 automatic, but it was better than nothing. He wondered why he had refused Remington's offered gun. Was it sheer bravado, making believe that there was no danger? Not likely, because he was just as aware of the potential danger as Remington; more so, in fact, since he had never told Remington about the booby trap of that morning. Was he really a sap, as he had told Remington? Partly true, but not *that* big a sap. It wasn't that he couldn't handle side-arms, either, because although he was not a crack marksman, he thought he remembered enough of his basic training to take care of himself in a pinch. Was he suspicious of Remington? Possibly, although he was not consciously so at the time he refused the gun. It was only now, alone in his garage, that he thought of the possibility of somebody being shot to death next morning with a bullet that a ballistics expert could fit to Remington's gun. No, it must have been an impulse, one of those sudden impulses which had been getting Gilmore into hot water at regular intervals ever since he had reached the age of reason. . . .

Gilmore got out of the car, swinging his flashlight in all directions. He walked toward the back of the house, sending the conical beam ahead of him to probe the paths and flower beds his father had laid out twenty years ago. If there was anything

amiss here, it was not evident in the colorful rows of stately hollyhocks or in the faint sweetness of honeysuckle. He was returning to the front of the house when he heard his telephone ringing.

His fingers trembled as he made two unsuccessful stabs at the keyhole of the front door. It was probably Barbara calling, he decided, and he wondered how he should react if she asked him to come back. He had felt definitely cheated by Remington's presence. He had been annoyed, too, by Barbara's retreat into her Arctic shell. In retrospect, however, he had to admit he felt somewhat relieved. What good could have come of reviving an old flame for a brief moment if it was to be extinguished forever? Still . . .

The phone rang again as he pushed the door open. He grabbed the instrument.

"Hello, Gil?"

It was a woman's voice, but it was not Barbara.

"Where are you, Frankie?"

"I'm home. Can I come over to your place?"

"No," Gilmore said. "Why did you run away from me, Frankie?"

"I'll explain when I see you. But I wasn't lying to you, was I, Gil? That was Bayliss's address, wasn't it?"

"You were telling the truth, Frankie."

"Did you see Bayliss?"

"He must have stepped out for a moment." Gilmore spoke low into the instrument, to avoid waking his mother. "Did you get your clothes together, Frankie?"

"Yes. Chris wasn't home. He hasn't come home yet. I don't know where he is. But I don't want to stay here tonight. Can't I come over to your place?"

"Definitely not."

"Then will you come over here?"

"Good Lord, no! Your neighborhood must be crawling with cops. Didn't you stumble over any while you were getting into the house?"

"I didn't notice any, Gil."

"Look, Frankie. I told you tonight I'd stake you to a trip to New York. I also said I'd drive you to the airport. If you still want to get away, tell me where to meet you."

There was no reply. The connection seemed to be broken. "Hello!" Gilmore said. "Hello! Frankie!"

"Sorry, Gil." Frankie's voice came back. "I was trying to think of a place. Do you know that all-night drug store at the corner of Clay and Western?"

"I'll meet you there in ten minutes."

"Give me fifteen, Gil. I've got to finish packing, and I'll have about six blocks to walk."

"Okay. Fifteen, then. See you, Frankie."

When Gilmore had hung up, he listened at the door of his mother's room. If the phone had awakened her, she would cough or make some other sign to let him know she was not asleep. When there was no sound, Gilmore wearily got his car out again and drove to the corner of Clay and Western.

He parked across the street from the drug store and waited. After twenty minutes he went into the store to buy a pack of cigarettes on the chance that he had missed Frankie's entrance. Aside from a drunk drowsing over a cup of coffee at the soda counter, a pair of lovers holding hands in a corner booth, and the white-haired night man who put down his racing sheet to sell Gilmore the cigarettes, the store was empty.

When Frankie did not appear after half an hour, Gilmore concluded that she had discovered she was being followed and was taking a roundabout route in an effort to shake her shadow.

At the end of an hour, he decided she was not coming at all. She had probably been picked up by one of Ritter's men and taken to the police station for questioning.

On his way home, Gilmore drove past the Froley house, which was only a few blocks away. The house was dark, so he drove around the block, came back and stopped. When he turned off his headlights, he saw a figure emerge from the shadows and approach the car. When the expected flashlight

shaft split the darkness, Gilmore flung back his own beam, catching the plain-clothes man full in the face.

"Hello, Brody," he said. "Lieutenant Ritter said you'd probably be around here. Getting much sleep?"

Brody grunted.

"Froley come home yet?" Gilmore asked.

"Nobody's come home since I come on," Brody said.

"I heard Mrs. Froley came home about an hour ago."

"Somebody's been kidding you." The detective yawned.

"Nobody's been in or out. Nobody, with a capital no."

When he got home, Gilmore took his Luger out of the drawer, wiped the thin coating of grease from the barrel, loaded it and slipped it under his pillow.

He lay awake for a long time, wondering why Frankie Froley had wanted to lure him away from home, and what good—or evil—could have been accomplished in the immediate vicinity during his absence.



## XIX

Gilmore awoke with a start. He jumped out of bed before his eyes were fully opened, and was somewhat surprised to note that sunlight was streaming in through his windows. A little sheepishly, he removed his Luger from under his pillow and replaced it in its usual drawer.

Glancing through the front window, he noticed the morning papers strewn over the front porch with their customary disorder. Ordinarily he retrieved them for a preliminary perusal before taking his shower, so he could give a selective reading of the headlines to his mother at breakfast. On this particular morning, however, he altered his routine. He preferred to finish shaving before looking at the *Tribune*. The danger of cutting himself would be greatly reduced. . . .

Old Mrs. Gilmore took her morning coffee in the garden when the weather was fine. The garden had been planted by Gilmore's late father, once professor of botany at Northbank College, with the physical assistance of Mrs. Gilmore and the old family gardener who still tottered around once a week, to prune, water and, in season, to tend the tiny kitchen vegetable patch. Mrs. Gilmore knew every plant in every bed—the rare collection of ornamental grasses; the anemones which bloomed in rotation from the early windflowers to the autumn-flowering Japanese varieties; the tall clump of handsome Matilija poppies (Mrs. Gilmore preferred to call them “canyon poppies” rather than be bothered with the pronunciation of “Matilija”) which were Professor Gilmore's particular pride because they were so difficult to grow successfully east of the Rockies and north of the magnolia belt.

Even since she had lost her sight, Mrs. Gilmore knew her way around the garden. She recognized the flowers and plants by

their location, the shape of the foliage, the texture of the petals, the almost-spectral fragrance of the flowers. She would say, "The St. Brigid anemones are blooming early this year, Gil." Or, "I don't know what that gardener is doing to the Gordonias, but your father would never have put up with the puny flowers we're getting now." The garden was one of the reasons Gilmore had been so anxious to get a job in Northbank when he got out of the Army. It would be indecent to uproot his mother from her familiar surroundings, to spend her remaining days in some nursing home. . . .

"Good morning, Bob," said Mrs. Gilmore as she kissed her son. "I don't like that new shaving lotion of yours. Too much oil of cloves. You smell like a baked ham."

"I'll throw it out, Victoria," Gilmore said. "It was a free sample with the shaving cream I bought the other day."

"Pour your coffee before it gets cold. What's new in the papers this morning?"

"Nothing much," said Gilmore, noting that the second-day story of Peggy Bayliss's funeral had crowded Korea, the United Nations, MacArthur, inflation, Iran and Eisenhower-for-president into purely secondary positions on Page One.

"Nothing about you, son?" the blind woman asked.

"I don't see anything," Gilmore replied, as his eye scanned the headlines. He found the story of Zina's disappearance in a two-column box below Peggy Bayliss's picture. It was a press-agency dispatch with a Washington date-line and recited essentially the same facts that Remington had repeated. There was only one difference: The press dispatch named the book—*Émile*.

He quickly skimmed through the story of the funeral until he came to a paragraph which read:

Robert Gilmore, press agent for Barzac, insisted to newspapermen that Miss Bayliss' death was due to natural causes, and scoffed at the idea of a Red plot aimed at U.S. Army rations. The *Tribune* has learned, however, that Gilmore was once married to Zina, the Moroccan dancer who disappeared

yesterday on the eve of her appearance as witness before the Senate investigation of subversive activities. According to the *Tribune's* information, the volume of Rousseau's *Émile*, which was to have figured as evidence in the dancer's testimony and which is also missing, was once in Gilmore's possession. Neither Gilmore nor Eugene Evans, Barzac general manager, could be reached for comment last night.

"Nope, not a thing," Gilmore added.

"I thought there might be something," his mother went on. "Some man called last night and said he was a reporter for the *Tribune*. He wanted to know if it was true that you were married to a Moroccan dancer. I told him I never meddled in your private affairs, and you never brought your wives home to me, Moroccan or otherwise. I told him he'd have to ask you about the intimate details of your life and loves."

"Good girl," Gilmore said.

"I sometimes wish, though, that you'd stayed married to that whirling she-dervish long enough for me to get a look at her. I'll bet she was a hell-cat."

"She was revolutionary."

"That toast must be soggy, son. Shall I have some fresh pieces made?"

"This is fine," Gilmore said.

"Then Mr. Quirk called. Wanted to know when you'd be home. You must have got in pretty late."

"Very late."

"If you'd got home earlier, maybe that man wouldn't have trampled down half the canyon poppies," the blind woman said.

"What man, Victoria?"

"I don't know who he was. He didn't tell me his name, and I'd never heard his voice before. It was rather a pleasant voice, though. I had a twinge of a headache after dinner, and there was no aspirin in the house, so I sent Miss Smith out to get some. She must have left the front door unlatched, because the

man came right in and spoke to me. He said he was looking for you."

A spot of cold formed in the small of Gilmore's back, as though a chunk of ice had been pushed against his spine. Had Froley actually had the nerve to come into the house after him?

"What did he want, Victoria?"

"He didn't tell me. He said he was sorry to disturb me and he'd come back later. I guess he did, too, because just as I was dozing off, I heard his voice again, in front of the house. Then I don't know what got into him because I heard him running through the grape arbor and across the back garden. I knew he tripped on something because I heard tall stalks thrashing. I thought he'd got into the hollyhocks, but this morning I found it was the canyon poppies. Too bad, because they were blooming so well this year. Your father was so proud of those poppies. Are they ruined, Bob?"

Gilmore walked from the flagstones of the little terrace to the sunny, sheltered corner where the Matilija poppies grew. One clump still stood shoulder high, flaunting huge white flowers with golden centers. Two clumps had been bent to the ground. The smaller plants around them had been flattened, too, as though Froley had been stretched full length by his fall and had rolled over to regain his feet.

"One bush is still okay, Victoria," Gilmore called. "And I think the other two will be all right next year if the gardener cuts them back."

Gilmore's eyes traced Froley's probable route through the garden after he had picked himself up. A box hedge separated the back of the garden from the alley that bisected the block. The alley was designed to allow the garbage trucks to make collections without affront to Northbank's lawns and front yards. A low gate in the box hedge gave access to the alley. Froley must have found the gate. . . .

"Robert, come back and finish your breakfast," Mrs. Gilmore said. "Your coffee will be stone cold."

Gilmore turned on his car radio for the morning news as he drove to the plant. When he realized that even with the difference in time, it was still too early to get the Wall Street opening prices, he turned it off again. He knew in advance what he would hear, anyhow. "Barzac Soup shares, which broke sharply just before closing yesterday, opened still lower this morning. . . ."

When he reached his desk, his secretary had just finished opening the mail.

"Morning, Bright Eyes," he said, as she put the stack of papers in front of him. "Any threatening notes today? Any demands for blackmail?"

"Just the usual," his secretary said. "Not even a demand for ransom."

Gilmore looked at his secretary curiously. He had scarcely thought of Frankie Frolely that morning, except with a lingering resentment at having been stood up for an hour. It had never occurred to him until this moment that she might have been kidnaped, possibly by her own husband. It was a silly thought in broad daylight, of course, regardless of how reasonable it might have seemed last night. He would go down to the third floor in a little while and probably find Frankie at work on her carrots.

He was leafing listlessly through the mail when his phone rang.

"It's Mr. Quirk," his secretary said. "He can hardly wait to see you."

Gilmore rose wearily. "From the tone of his voice," he asked, "would you suggest that I change into asbestos underwear?"

"I think," his secretary replied, "you had better wear rubber gloves, a gauze mask and a white gown. Maybe you'd better take forceps, too. Mr. Quirk seems on the point of giving birth to something or other."

"Thank you," said Gilmore, buttoning his jacket. "You might phone the vet to join me."



Calvin Quirk was wrapped tightly in his usual lipless, cadaverous mien. Even more so, Gilmore thought. He seemed more than ever to cry for a mortician's cosmetics. His usual tallow complexion was this morning a pale green, as though he had just been fished from the river after a week's submersion. Only his hands gave restless evidence that he was still alive—his moving hands and his worried eyes.

"Sit down, Gilmore," Quirk said. "Mr. Evans phoned that he wants to see you as soon as he comes in, but unfortunately he's been delayed at his doctor's. Meanwhile, there's a matter you may be able to clear up for us. You know about Froley, of course."

"Froley?" Gilmore crossed his legs with what he hoped was supreme nonchalance. "What about Froley?"

"He's a Communist, it seems," Quirk said. "As I told you, Mr. Evans had private information to that effect a fortnight ago, and immediately wrote to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, asking for confirmation and advice. There was an F.B.I. man in here this morning who says that Froley is indeed a Communist, but he swears the F.B.I. received no such letter. Yet Mr. Evans swears he wrote and signed it."

"Which one do you think is mistaken—Mr. Evans or the F.B.I.?"

Quirk gave Gilmore a reproachful look. Had he been a man addicted to tobacco, Quirk would undoubtedly at this moment have lighted a pipe or cigar or at least a cigarette. As it was, he had trouble occupying his hands. He had twisted three paper clips into obscene outlines while talking.

"You must excuse me, Gilmore," he said, "if I fail to join in your facetious view of this matter. It's a very serious matter for me. Obviously, the word of neither Mr. Evans nor the F.B.I. can be questioned. However, they may *both* question *my* word!"

"Sorry, Mr. Quirk. I didn't know you were mixed up in this. What happened?"

"You may remember that Mr. Evans was ill about a fortnight

ago." Quirk attacked still another paper clip. "He was at home for three days with an asthmatic attack. During that period, I spent several hours a day in Mr. Evans's office, going through his mail, and answering the most urgent letters that did not require his personal decision. Mr. Evans says that the last thing he did before rushing home to his sick bed was to sign a batch of letters which were on his desk. The letter to the F.B.I. was among them. The letter must therefore have still been on the desk when I took over temporarily that day." Quirk dropped the deformed paper clip into the wastebasket. He waited for the *ping* before he resumed. "Mr. Evans's secretary agrees that this is probably the case. She remembers typing the letter and placing it, together with the carbon, as is her custom, on his desk the day he was taken ill. Yet there is no carbon in the file. I swear to God, Gilmore, that I didn't see that letter! I didn't! Did you?"

"I?" Gilmore straightened in his chair. "Why should I have seen it?"

"You were in Mr. Evans's office that afternoon to speak to me," Quirk said, leaning back majestically. "As I recall it, we were interrupted several times by telephone calls. I was somewhat distracted and may even have turned my back on you for a moment. Do you recall me turning my back to you while talking on the telephone?"

Gilmore opened his mouth, then bit down hard on the expletive that rose to his lips. So the poison was working! The *Tribune's* venomous seeds of suspicion were sprouting like mad.

"Is that an accusation, Mr. Quirk?"

Quirk's hard eyes left no doubt about the matter. His lipless mouth, however, framed an amiable denial.

"Not at all, Gilmore. I was merely asking if you recalled anything untoward that happened that afternoon in Mr. Evans's office."

Then the phone rang, and Gilmore offered up a silent prayer of thanks to Alexander Graham Bell.

"That was Mr. Remington," said Mr. Quirk, replacing the instrument with the ends of his fingers, as though he were disposing of a very dead fish. "It seems we are going to resume production of the Army rations today. Mr. Remington is on the third floor with Dr. Coffee and that police lieutenant. He has asked that you join them there now."

"I wonder if it's wise for me to visit the third floor while I'm under suspicion of having filched F.B.I. correspondence from the boss's files," said Gilmore. As the literal-minded Quirk seemed not quite sure if he was joking or not, he added, "I might not be a good security risk."

"Dr. Coffee and that police lieutenant apparently want you present for some reason of their own," said Mr. Quirk. "You'll check back here when you're through, won't you, Gilmore?"

Entering the all-pervading din and clatter of the third floor was a little like diving into an icy pool. The noise was breathtaking at first, but after a few vigorous strokes through the crest of the sound waves, the decibels were no longer noticeable. Gilmore moved through the orderly confusion of the kitchens toward the battery of nickel blending kettles, standing in an imposing row on their low platforms, gleaming through the fragrant vapors and clouds of live steam from the nozzles of a clean-up crew at work in the foreground. He saw Remington at the foot of the platform, as dapper as usual in a suit of beige tussah silk. He was talking to Dr. Coffee, while Papa Lenormand was explaining something to Max Ritter with broad gestures.

As he walked toward the group, Gilmore automatically glanced toward the carrot tables. He was startled to see that Frankie Frole was at her accustomed place in white cap and blue blouse, bending over the heap of red-gold vegetables, her eyes lowered as though to avoid Gilmore's searching gaze.

Gilmore slowed his step, hesitated, pondered the advisability of going over to the carrot table to upbraid Frankie for standing him up the night before. Frankie continued to avoid his eyes.

A knife flashed as her nimble fingers moved expertly through their routine.

Gilmore thought he heard his name called above the hiss of steam and the drumming of machinery. He turned his head to see Remington shaking a mocking finger at him. Unsmiling, he continued his way to join the group near the blending kettles.

"Run into any trouble with Froley after you left me last night?" Remington asked.

Gilmore shook his head.

"Lucky," said Remington. "I don't know what the guy's up to. He didn't come to work yesterday or today, and the lieutenant here says he didn't come home last night."

"I guess Gilmore knows all about that," Max Ritter said. "He does his own snooping."

"You don't mind sitting in with us on this session, do you, Gilmore?" Dr. Coffee asked. "This has been your party from the beginning, so to speak, so I thought—"

"What about the chain of command?" Gilmore spoke directly to Remington. "Why isn't my immediate superior here? The Army rations have been Miss Wall's concern right along."

If Remington noted any bitterness in Gilmore's words, he ignored it. "Barbara phoned she'll be late this morning," he said. "She's not feeling very well."

"Look, Chef," Dr. Coffee was dipping his hand into an open barrel of monosodium glutamate, letting the fine, snow-white crystals run through his fingers. "How much of this stuff goes into a batch of rations?"

Pierre Lenormand shook his head. He was toying with the long yellow tail of his briquet, nervously snapping the ratchet wheel, snuffing out the glow that appeared at the end of the tinder-rope; smoking was prohibited on the floor of Barzac kitchens. "I am sorry, Doctor," he said, "but I have still not received special dispensation from our beloved chief, Mr. Evans, to reveal to you our secret recipes. Do you have such authority, Mr. Remington?"



"I'm afraid not," the production manager said. "However——"

"Let's skip the double talk," said Dr. Coffee. "I've been watching your assistant weigh twenty-odd pounds of monosodium glutamate into that kettle. Is it true that each kettle makes seven hundred cans of rations?"

"Approxatively," said the Frenchman.

Dr. Coffee was jotting down figures in a notebook. "Part of this puzzle," he said, "is a matter of simple mathematics. I ought to have the answer very soon, now. Would you folks like to join me for lunch at Raoul's about twelve-thirty?"

"At Raoul's," said Pierre Lenormand eagerly, "it would be a double pleasure."

"I'm afraid I have an executive luncheon today," Remington said. "The big chief has things on his mind. Perhaps I could join you later."

"I don't have to ask Max. He'd walk a mile for a rabbit in white wine. What about you, Gilmore?"

"Gladly."

"Good. Now, Chef, about the eggs." Dr. Coffee's pencil was poised about his notebook. "I understand you put dehydrated eggs into your beef mixture. How much goes into each batch?"

Again the chef shook his head. He wound the yellow tinder-rope of his lighter around a stubby forefinger, then unwound it. "I am sorry," he said, "but the secret proportions of our recipes I cannot reveal. However, if you watch——"

"I've been watching," Dr. Coffee said. "I've had my eye on that barrel of dried eggs ever since we came in. But nobody's touched it."

"Nobody——? *Nom d'un nom!*" Lenormand seized the arm of a passing assistant, whirled him around so abruptly that centrifugal force flattened his tall white bonnet, and pushed him toward the barrel. "*Petit paresseux!*" he shouted. "*Veux tu m'ouvrir ce tonneau d'oeufs en poudre? Et plus vite que ça!*"

The assistant silently readjusted his white bonnet. He took a hammer from the platform and applied the claw to the cleat across the barrel head, muttering to himself. The barrel head



creaked, came away easily and fell to the floor. Then the hammer dropped.

The assistant chef stared into the barrel and the color drained from his face like wine from an overturned flask. His shoulders sagged. His lips moved spasmodically. Then he sat down abruptly on the edge of the platform and uttered a small, dry, croaking sound.

Lenormand, Ritter, and Dr. Coffee reached the barrel simultaneously, with Remington and Gilmore one step behind. Gilmore's elbows overcame the one-step handicap. He was cold all over, his scalp tingled, and he could feel the icy perspiration oozing into beads of dread on his forehead.

There were no powdered eggs in the barrel. Instead, there was the body of a man, his knees under his chin, doubled up like a foetus. Gilmore gazed in horror at the purple, tumid face and the glazed, bulging eyes. The grotesque mask had no link with reality. It was all sheer macabre fantasy, particularly the greenish cloud that seemed to float above the dark lips like a sprig of parsley in the mouth of a roast suckling pig.

Gilmore fought hard to keep down the surge of nausea that rose in him when he finally recognized the face of the dead man as that of Christopher Froleay.

## XX

The brusque intrusion of death did not halt the Gargantuan cookery in progress on Barzac's third floor. Except for the group about the barrel and the badly shaken assistant chef sitting on the blending platform, nobody was aware that anything was amiss. Across the vast kitchens men were pitchforking chickens by the dozen into great simmering broth kettles. The blue-and-white acre of girls still peeled and sorted and sliced choice vegetables. Cooks' helpers trundled up more spices by the hundredweight for a nation's palate. Steam still shrieked from opened retorts, savory soups still poured down into the moving ranks of inviting cans. Machines thumped and whirled and clanked.

Max Ritter, suddenly very much the policeman, replaced the barrel head and said to Remington: "Get your Captain Kavlik up here with a few of his guards to keep off the gawkers."

When Remington went for a phone, Ritter continued: "This has to be a Coroner's case, Doc, but I wish you'd look the stiff over before the old man gets here and starts messing up evidence. We got a right to move the body a little, because it's already been moved from Lord knows where. Can't we get a little semi-privacy around here, Gilmore?"

Gilmore indicated the tall stainless-steel screen that stood out from the opposite wall to shield the cannery girls from chill blasts when the huge refrigerator doors were opened. "You won't be bothered back there," he said.

He helped Ritter lift the barrel to the low three-wheeled hand truck that Papa Lenormand had commandeered. Chris Froley was much heavier than he would have thought.

By the time they had rolled the truck behind the steel wind screen, Remington was back with two uniformed guards.

Ritter took the top off the barrel again and peered inside. "This party don't look like that photo of Bayliss," he said.

"It's Chris Froley," Gilmore said. He saw Remington watching him curiously across the barrel.

"No wonder he didn't come home last night," Ritter said. "Or did he? How long has he been in there, Doc?"

Dr. Coffee had been bending over the barrel, exploring its macabre contents with long, capable fingers. "The man's been dead at least eight to ten hours," he said. "Maybe longer. In this weather it takes longer than usual for rigor mortis to be complete, and it is now. To be doubled up like that, he was either killed inside the barrel or dumped in within a few hours of his death."

"What killed him, Doc?"

"You know me better than that, Max, to expect a diagnosis before an autopsy. If you want a guess, I'd say asphyxia in some form. Of course the cyanosis of the face could be produced by some poisons, too, like— Hello, what's this?"

The pathologist had grasped the little tuft of greenery poised between Chris Froley's lips and tugged gently. As he slowly withdrew his hand, a long, slender carrot emerged from the dead man's throat.

Gilmore clamped his jaws shut and swallowed.

"I'll be damned! A carrot!" Ritter exclaimed redundantly. "Hey, now, maybe we're getting places. Don't this guy's wife have something to do with carrots in this shop?"

Remington looked at Gilmore as he replied: "Frances Froley is the fastest, most skillful peeler of carrots that ever worked for Barzac. But that carrot in the doctor's hand is proof positive, as far as I'm concerned, that Mrs. Froley had nothing whatever to do with her husband's death."

A puzzled frown united Ritter's eyebrows. "I don't get it," he said.

"That carrot is a red herring, if a carrot can be called a herring," Remington insisted.

"It's quite likely," Dr. Coffee said, "that Froley was choked to death with the carrot."

"I won't argue with you there," Remington continued. "But whoever killed Froley expected the carrot to throw suspicion on his wife. Actually, it clears her of suspicion. Because this particular carrot establishes pretty definitely that Froley was killed by someone who doesn't work for Barzac. Or at least by someone who hasn't worked here long enough to be familiar with our operations."

It was Dr. Coffee's turn to frown. "It's an interesting theory," he said, "but I'm like Max. It doesn't make sense to me."

"You explain it, Gilmore," Remington said. "I'm sure you've done it before to every delegation of visitors you've taken through the plant."

So Gilmore explained. He pointed out that the carrot found in Froley's throat was of the long Danvers variety, the kind usually bought by housewives. The Danvers carrot was not used by Barzac for making soups for two reasons: First, it tapered to a long, narrow, pointed tail which would completely confuse the mechanical dicers into turning out cubes of varied shape and size. Second, it had a yellow core, which would cause the dicer to turn out vari-colored cubes. Therefore Barzac used exclusively a French variety of carrot called the Chantenay. The Chantenay tapered only slightly and had a blunt tip with which the mechanical dicer could cope with ease. Moreover, it had no yellow core and was of a uniform reddish orange color throughout. So it produced cubes of uniform size and color.

"I think it's reasonably certain, Doctor," Gilmore concluded, "that the carrot you're holding there is the first and only Danvers that's been inside this plant in years."

"I get it," Ritter said. "It could be a frame by some guy who don't know about carrots—some guy, maybe, who's been working around here just a few days and only knows about tomatoes."

Gilmore nodded, thinking of Bayliss.

Remington said, "Exactly."

At that moment Calvin Quirk poked his head around the end of the screen and said: "Oh, there you are, Gilmore. Mr. Evans has come in. He wants to see you at once."

"Does he know about—about this?" Gilmore nodded at the barrel.

"He knows. Remington reported," said Quirk ominously. "And Mr. Evans still wants to see you."

Mr. Evans was brief and, for a man of his usual circuitous mental processes, to the point. The bald little boss of Barzac sat behind his bare desk, giving off a faint but unmistakable odor of antiseptics. He said: "Sit down, Gilmore. Of course you know why I sent for you."

"You've been reading this morning's *Tribune*," Gilmore said.

Mr. Evans nodded. "I've also been listening to the radio. Barzac shares opened four points lower in Wall Street this morning and dropped another two and one-half in the first thirty minutes of trading. Now that Froleys has turned up dead here at the plant, there's bound to be another sharp break."

"Today is Saturday, Mr. Evans. The New York Exchange will be closing in a few minutes. I'm sure we can hold up the news about Froleys until after the Chicago closing."

"We'll have a breather over the weekend and we should no doubt be thankful for small favors." Mr. Evans sighed. "But I shudder to think of Monday. I'll certainly be hearing from our big stockholders over the weekend, and they'll probably be unloading Monday, unless——"

"Unless you can report that you've accepted my resignation?"

Mr. Evans did not answer at once. He drew a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and thoughtfully patted his tiny gray mustache. "Is the *Tribune* story true?" he asked.

"Essentially, yes."

The swivel chair squealed as Mr. Evans pivoted to stare out the window. Without looking at Gilmore he said: "I want to be fair. I don't believe a man is necessarily a Russian agent just because he likes caviar, or reads Tolstoy, or enjoys listening to



Prokofiev, or even because he was once married to a refugee from the Franco revolution. However——”

“I’ll repeat now what I said yesterday,” Gilmore interrupted. “I’m not going to resign, because resignation would be a tacit admission of guilt of some kind. I’m not guilty of a damned thing, except of trying to prevent a few thousand American soldiers from being poisoned, and, incidentally, the subsequent embarrassment to Barzac. If you consider that reprehensible, go ahead and fire me.”

“Now, now, Gilmore. Please keep your shirt on. I have no intention of dismissing you. At least not without a thorough investigation in which you would have ample opportunity to state your own case. But during the next few days I’m going to be subjected to pressures, Gilmore. The press is going to ask questions. The Army and the F.B.I. have already started to ask questions. When did you plan to take your vacation, Gilmore?”

“Next month.”

“Then advance the date. Consider yourself on vacation as of this moment.”

“And what happens after two weeks?”

“We can take further counsel at the end of the fortnight.” Mr. Evans still stared out the window as he talked. “Meanwhile, it would be advisable if you left town for a while. In any case, I should hope not to see you around the plant.”

“I see.” Gilmore lit a cigarette and blew out the match with an unnecessarily violent gust of smoke. “So when reporters ask more questions, they will be referred to Miss Wall. And Barbara will be able to say that Gilmore is no longer working here.”

“I don’t know how Miss Wall intends to handle the press. Whether or not she will find it necessary to disclose that you are still on our payroll——”

“I’m sure that Barbara’s relations with the press will continue to be excellent.” Gilmore got up and started for the door. “Good-bye, Mr. Evans. I’ll see you in two weeks.”

“Just a moment, Gilmore.” The swivel chair whined. Gilmore turned. For the first time in five minutes, Mr. Evans

looked him in the eyes. "Do you know about that letter I wrote to the F.B.I. about Froley?"

"I heard about it," Gilmore said.

"Then you know that it must have disappeared while I was ill and Quirk was sitting at my desk."

"I know that Mr. Quirk swears he didn't see the letter."

"Nevertheless, you do recall the date on which I was first confined to my home?"

"Not off-hand," Gilmore said. "There may be some notes on my calendar pad which would refresh my memory. I'll look them up as soon as I get back from my vacation, two weeks from next Monday. Good-bye, Mr. Evans."

## XXI

Dr. Coffee had left the Barzac plant as soon as the police crews began arriving. He did not wait for the Coroner, who was certain to be late, and who would add nothing to the solution of the case anyhow. The vastness of the Coroner's ignorance of forensic medicine was equaled only by the extent of his political connections. Max Ritter, the pathologist knew, could be depended upon to talk the Coroner into letting him, Dan Coffee, perform the Froleys autopsy. So the doctor returned to his laboratory at Pasteur Hospital for an hour of routine before lunch.

He was the first to arrive at Raoul's, a pocket-size restaurant, one flight up, just a stone's throw from the Barzac plant. He was always glad of an excuse to lunch at Raoul's, because the red-faced Norman proprietor-chef lavished his skill on such inelegant delicacies as tripe, calves'-brain fritters, skewered kidneys, and rabbit—all of which were great favorites of Dan Coffee's, perhaps because he never got them at home. He was particularly pleased to come to Raoul's on Saturday, because Saturday was the day for rabbit fricasseed in white wine.

For twenty years Julia Coffee had stubbornly refused to cook rabbit for her pathologist husband because, she maintained, it looked too much like skinned cat. Even without prejudice, it is doubtful if she could have mustered the loving care that Raoul put into the preparation of the dish. He would brown the pieces of young rabbit in butter, and when the meat was richly golden, he would pour on a small glass of brandy and light it. After the blue flames had flickered out, he would dust in a little flour and seasoning, then add half a bottle of good white wine, a cup of chicken broth, a sprig of thyme, a bay leaf or two, a bouquet of parsley and a handful of pitted green

olives, a dozen tiny white onions, a clove of garlic, some diced gammon, and, after the rabbit had been cooking for half an hour, a few mushrooms. The resulting symphony of lovely smells played chords and arpeggios on Dr. Coffee's appetite as he walked up the narrow stairs.

Both small dining rooms were crowded, but Raoul reshuffled two tables of young chefs from Barzac to make room for Dr. Coffee and the guests he said he was expecting. The pathologist made a mental note to ask Papa Lenormand why his assistant cooks flocked to Raoul's at lunchtime instead of eating in one of the many Barzac cafeterias.

Dr. Coffee had just begun to strew the red-and-white checkered tablecloth with shattered fragments of brittle French-bread crust when Max Ritter arrived, closely followed by Gilmore.

"Let me waste no time in telling you gents that I'm here under false pretenses," Gilmore said. "Just say the word, and I'll go quietly, and no hard feelings. Because I'm not going to be much use to either of you from here on in. I've been warned off the turf at Barzac for the next two weeks. So I'm out of the picture."

"The hell you are," Ritter said. "I've just started asking you questions. So tuck a napkin under your chin and order. What are we eating, Doc? Rabbit? You'll want rabbit, Gilmore. It's really the nuts, the way Raoul fixes it. And if you were still on a press agent's expense account, I'd let you buy us a small bottle of white wine. What was that California wine we drank last time we had rabbit here, Doc?"

"Folle Blanche," said Dr. Coffee.

"Folle Blanche, Raoul," Gilmore ordered. "And it's on me—to celebrate my vacation. Anything new on Froley?"

Ritter made eyebrows at Dr. Coffee.

The pathologist said: "The Coroner has magnanimously phoned his permission for me to do an autopsy this afternoon, knowing that I'll let him take the newspaper credit, if any. So I haven't anything new on that score."

"Okay, then, Doc," the detective said. "I got this to report. It ain't all about Froley, but some of it is. First, I traced the dynamite. That camphor smell we noticed did the trick. Seems like dosing dynamite with camphor makes it less ticklish to bumps, and safer to handle. The Agriculture Department at Barzac has been blasting stumps to clear some new land for experimental farms. They use camphorized dynamite to reduce the danger of accidents. Most of the stuff is stored out of town, but there's some still in No. 2 Warehouse here in Northbank.

"So I check at No. 2 Warehouse, and I find that ten days ago somebody draws a case of dynamite, a coil of fuse, a box of percussion caps. I see a copy of the requisition, but the signature is nothing but a scrawl. There's also another item on the same requisition—a barrel of white arsenic.

"I locate the stores clerk that handled the requisition and he says he don't question the signature, even if he can't read it, because the printed requisition form is otherwise in order. He also don't recognize the guy who drew the stores, because he's been transferred from Warehouse No. 6 just a few weeks ago, and don't know many of the birds in Agriculture. He remembers, though, that the guy loaded the stuff in a dark blue Chevvy. Froley has—had—a dark blue Chevvy. So from Froley to Bayliss——"

"Have you located Bayliss yet?" Gilmore interrupted.

"None of your damned business," Ritter said in a tone that admitted defeat.

"It's very much my business," Gilmore said. "Didn't you read the *Tribune* this morning?"

"You mean about that kooch dancer you used to shack-up with? What's she got to do with Bayliss?"

"It was through Bayliss that I met the gal, and I have a crazy hunch that he knows where she is. This all may not have anything to do with poisoned rations and Peggy's death, but if the F.B.I.—"

"Don't worry about the F.B.I. When they get around to you



they'll have more questions than you got answers. So start saving up. It won't be long now."

"Hello, Chef," Dr. Coffee said. "You're just in time."

White-haired Pierre Lenormand lumbered over from the stairway and took a chair. "I excuse myself," he said. "I am late. Did you order me the *gibelotte*?"

"Rabbit," said Ritter.

"The same thing," said Lenormand.

"Pass your glass, Chef," Ritter said. "Gilmore is buying wine."

"Folle Blanche? Good. It recalls the Chablis." Lenormand sipped, sniffed, then drank deeply. "I am late," he continued, "because the big manitous wished me to sit with them in conference. I left after one hour. I am not made for conferences. I am a cook. I know what I am doing, therefore, I have confidence in my handiwork. These manitous, these have no confidence. They are mad. They are hysterical. They are like a hen who has lost her chicks. And why? Because some stockbrokers in New York are selling Barzac Soup Company shares at bargain prices? Ah, Raoul! *Te voilà enfin avec ta gibelotte. Elle est bonne aujourd'hui, au moins?*"

"Attention, messieurs," Raoul interrupted, placing a steaming earthenware casserole on the table. "It is very hot. Shall I serve you, Doctor?"

"Please," said Dr. Coffee, sniffing at the wisps of aromatic vapor curling around Raoul's fork and spoon poised above the casserole.

"Would you like a thigh?" asked the restaurant proprietor. "Or perhaps Maître Lenormand would prefer the thigh?"

"Dr. Coffee and I," said Lenormand, "are of an age when we no longer fight over a thigh."

"Just give me some of the meat," Max Ritter said. "More wine, Chef?"

"Gladly," said Lenormand, passing his glass. "You know what I told the manitous at the meeting? I said, 'You are crazy, all of you. But crazy. What do you care what happens in Wall Street? It is not disaster. It is perhaps even good luck for some-

one. If I had the money, it would be good luck for me. Maybe it should be good luck for me anyhow. Maybe I should take the little nest egg, maybe I should take the money under the mattress, the money I am keeping to retire to the little farm at Tourette-sur-Loup, and instead buy myself a piece of Barzac Soup Company at half price. What if we lose the Army contract? So what? All right, we lose a few thousand dollars. So what? We still make the best soup in the country. If we charged one dollar a can, we could not make better cream of tomato soup than we are making now. I could not make better cream of tomato soup in my own kitchen. We use ninety-two-score fresh butter, the finest heavy cream, the best ripe tomatoes that can be grown.' Tomatoes that your wife will buy in her neighborhood market, Doctor, are tomatoes the Government graders will not even allow to reach our plant. For a few pennies any woman in the country can get not only the finest ingredients but the most skilled cooks in the— But I am keeping you gentlemen from eating."

"Not me, you're not," said Max Ritter, pushing his rabbit bones to the side of his plate and breaking off another four inches of French bread to attack the savory wine sauce.

Papa Lenormand chewed vigorously on a mouthful of rabbit before he resumed.

"I do not usually boast,' I told these manitous," he said. "But do you know who taught me to make soup? Alexandre Gastaud. Perhaps you never heard of Alexandre Gastaud. But you have heard of the great Escoffier. And you have heard the name of Ritz. When D'Oyly-Carte stole a young Swiss named Ritz from the Grand Hotel at Monte Carlo to manage the Savoy in London, Ritz insisted on taking his chef, Escoffier, and Escoffier insisted on taking his assistant, Alexandre Gastaud. When Ritz and Escoffier became famous, when Escoffier took off his white bonnet and put on his tuxedo to mingle with the diners, when Escoffier began writing cookbooks, Gastaud was still in the kitchen, teaching the new generation of sauce cooks and fry cooks and maitre-queues. For years, Gastaud *was*

Escoffier. Gastaud was one of the world's great chefs. And I, Lenormand, was his star pupil. Now, today, any wife in America for ten cents, or fifteen cents, can have Pierre Lenormand make soup for her husband, thanks to Barzac and the American canning industry. And you men are in a panic over the future of Barzac? Ridiculous! You are raving maniacs!' I told the manitous. 'Me, I am going to get myself a good lunch. It makes more logic.' And I left them. Raoul, more potatoes. These gentlemen are starving."

Lenormand helped himself to more rabbit and devoted himself further to the business of making logic.

"Apparently, Chef," Gilmore said, "you don't regard two murders at Barzac kitchens within a week as very important."

"Important, yes." Lenormand gestured with his fork. "And deeply regrettable. But important for the police. Instead of acting like hysterical old women, the big manitous should leave the matter completely in the proper hands, like yours, Doctor, and yours, Lieutenant. By the way, are you making progress?"

"Some," Dr. Coffee said. "At least we've found answers to two questions that were puzzling me in regard to the poisoned rations which killed Peggy Bayliss."

The problems, the pathologist went on to explain, were these: How could the rations have been poisoned in spite of the thorough and efficient system of checks and inspection prevailing at the Barzac plant? Why did only nine batches of the rations contain arsenic?

"The most obvious answer to the first question," Dr. Coffee said, "was that the arsenic had been substituted for some other ingredient normally used in the cooking of the rations. In fact, the monosodium glutamate you folks use to season the rations is a small white crystal closely resembling, to the naked eye, the crystals of arsenious oxide, which is white arsenic. I thought the substitution might have been accidental until today, when Max discovered that a barrel of white arsenic had been taken from No. 2 Warehouse, ostensibly for the Agriculture Department, by a man who may have been Christopher Froley. And

Froley's record, his actions during the past few days, and finally his death, of course dispel any idea of accident.

"After watching your preparations this morning, Chef, and checking with my own figures, I'm convinced that the arsenic was put into the rations by your own cooks who thought they were using monosodium glutamate. I saw your men putting twenty-two pounds of the glutamate into an eighty-gallon kettle. It comes in two-hundred-pound barrels, I noted. So one barrel would serve to season nine batches of rations. Samples from exactly nine batches showed traces of arsenic. Therefore we can assume that only one barrel of arsenic was involved—the one we have traced."

"Nine batches," Gilmore interrupted, "make about sixty-five hundred cans. How much arsenic would that put into each can?"

"About half an ounce in each can," the pathologist said. "Half an ounce is more than two hundred grains—which is about sixty times the lethal dose, if absorbed."

"Good Lord!" Gilmore said. "And I took a bite of that stuff, too, to please Peggy."

"It must have been a very small bite," Dr. Coffee said, "or your system wasn't absorbing very well that morning. Because you've been in pretty good health since—except for that eye."

Lenormand half-masted the huge checkered napkin around his neck as a signal for Raoul to bring coffee.

"You have not yet explained how your arsenic got from No. 2 Warehouse to the glutamate barrel on the third floor of the Main Building," the chef said.

"A cinch, Chef," Ritter declared. "The same way that Froley's body got to the third floor in a dried-egg barrel. It took me ten minutes to unwind that one. Don't tell me you haven't figured it, Chef."

"I would like to hear your theory," Lenormand noisily stirred his coffee. "I will tell you if it is feasible."

"Simple," Ritter said. "Practically childish. The switch takes place on the loading platform at the back of the Main Building.



outside, near the freight elevators. When the second shift knocks off at eleven, and the maintenance and cleaning crews come on, the clean-up guys bring down the empty barrels and crates and stuff and stack 'em at one end of this platform. During the hour before the day shift comes on at six-thirty, the trucks come in to unload new supplies for the day's cooking. The new stuff goes on the other end of the platform, all tagged with different colored tickets to show what floor it goes to and for what kind of soup operation. Between two a.m. and five a.m. there's usually nobody around the platform at all, except the watchman who punches his time clock there every hour. So about ten days ago, some guy drives up between the watchman's rounds and dumps two hundred pounds of white arsenic into an empty glutamate barrel, puts the top back on, rolls it to the other end of the platform, and slaps a purple tag on it, meaning 'Third Floor, blending kettles.' And that does it.

"Last night the same thing happens—only this time it's Chris Frolej that's dumped into an empty barrel and rolled to the other end of the platform. And the same purple tag gets slapped on the egg barrel. Are we warm, Chef?"

"I think," said Lenormand soberly, "that you are very, very hot."

"Great stars!" Dr. Coffee looked at his watch. "I've got to get back to the hospital before I go down to the morgue to meet the Coroner. Looks like Remington won't be coming."

"Still meeting with the manitous, of course." Lenormand began rolling a cigarette. "Meeting and eating vulcanized cheese sandwiches and drinking coffee out of cardboard boxes. And talking, talking. So I go back to my kettles. A pleasant afternoon, gentlemen."

Gilmore rode as far as Pasteur Hospital with Dr. Coffee and Max Ritter. He thought he had better tell them about Frolej's apparent visit to his house and the flight through the back garden. He told his mother's version first, with the confirming details from Remington's story, and the evidence of the



flattened canyon poppies. He also inquired about Frances Froley.

"She seems to be taking it calmly enough," Dr. Coffee said. "She's probably a little stunned."

"Stunned, my eye!" was Ritter's comment. "She's blooming. She's goggle-eyed with excitement. You'd think she was used to having a husband murdered every other week. She loves the limelight. The F.B.I. have got her stashed away in an expensive hotel downtown. She'll be sorry when they finish questioning her. For more reasons than one. She won't like it so much when I start working her over, without benefit of room service and photographers. After all, homicide is still the business of the Northbank police."

"Wouldn't you like to know, Ritter," Gilmore asked, "where Frances Froley spent the night last night?"

"Sure," the detective said, "but I can tell you in advance that I don't believe what you're going to tell me. I'm always leary of these gallant alibis in a murder case. There's never any corroborations by bedside witnesses."

"I can't give Frankie Froley an alibi beyond eleven-thirty when I last saw her," Gilmore said. "She phoned me two hours later, but I can't tell you where she was calling from. I have a hunch she was with someone. She seemed to be consulting somebody when she made a date to meet me—which she never kept. If you could find out——"

"Okay, Gilmore, don't be jealous," Ritter said. "We'll find out."

On his way home Gilmore stopped at a florist shop and ordered two dozen roses sent to Mrs. Christopher Froley—without a card enclosed.

As an afterthought he selected a dozen gardenias and gave instructions that they be fashioned into a wreath to be sent to Barbara Wall. For these flowers he wrote a card. It read simply: "In memoriam. Gil."

He slipped the card into an envelope, frowned at it, then took it out and tore it up.

He wrote another card reading, "In memory of our lost night last night." He tore up that one, too.

Finally he countermanded his instructions for a wreath and told the florist to divide the dozen gardenias into two corsages.

His third card read, "For the two Barbaras; may one of you feel better soon."

## XXII

It was late afternoon before Dr. Coffee returned to his pathology laboratory, carrying two large paper bags containing quart Mason jars. Max Ritter, who followed him, carried a small white-enameled pail and a large paper-wrapped bundle.

Dr. Motilal Mookerji was sitting at the sink, cutting tissue with a pair of scissors, when the door swung closed behind the two men. He slid from the tall stool.

"Five times greetings, Doctor Sahib," said the Hindu resident. "Did prosection reveal felonious clues to identity of homicidal wrongdoer?"

"At least we kept the Coroner from throwing away the wrong pieces," the pathologist said. "Any messages, Doris?"

"Your wife called," replied the dark-haired technician, placing a rack of test tubes into the centrifuge. "She wanted to remind you that you were having guests for dinner so you'd be home on time. I told her I thought you wouldn't be very late."

"I'll have to come in tomorrow anyhow," Dr. Coffee said, "so I guess I'll make it home for dinner."

"Your wife said you'd better not be more than an hour late," Doris Hudson continued, "because if she had to serve more than three rounds of martinis, the guests wouldn't know what they were eating, and besides you would complain that the lamb was too done."

Dr. Coffee chuckled. Then he took the pail from the detective and handed it to Doris. "Formalin," he said. "And save the whole brain. I think I'll find out all I need by gross sections. I'll let you know if we'll want anything further. And the usual on these." He placed the jars on the technician's workbench.

"What do you want done with Froley's duds?" Ritter asked. "Bring them into my office," the pathologist said. "Come along, Dr. Mookerji."

Dr. Coffee took the paper parcel from Ritter, placed it on his desk, and undid it gingerly.

"Max," he continued, "if that penny-pinching Northbank City Council would ever cough up enough money for a police lab, maybe you folks would have one of those miniature vacuum cleaners that Dr. Locard devised for dust analysis. As it is, I'm going to have to put Dr. Mookerji to work with a fine-tooth comb, a set of camel's-hair brushes, and a few dozen cellophane envelopes to collect microscopic evidence from Froley's trouser-cuffs, seams, and other likely spots. I don't know what we'll find besides dehydrated egg powder, but we'll have a look."

"Am suggesting superior method to comb-and-brush technique," Dr. Mookerji said. "Am partial to floating short-term loan of suction-drain apparatus from dental clinic during non-clinical hours. Same should facilitate extraction of dust particles from clothing of deceased."

"Good. Let's try it," said Dr. Coffee.

"And now, Doc, how about giving me the low-down on what made Froley stop ticking besides the carrot."

"You were looking over my shoulder, Max, while I wrote the death certificate."

"Sure. But do I know what an occidantal fracture is? Or a . . . a sub-adenoid whosis?"

Dr. Coffee laughed. "You've been around here so much, Max," he said, "that sometimes I forget you don't know the language. The linear occipital fracture was a crack across the back of Froley's skull. The subarachnoid hemorrhage—bleeding between the brain proper and the membrane that covers it—was probably caused by the fracture."

"Which means that Froley got socked in the back of the head?"

"With something harder, if no bigger, than a man's hand.

I'll know more about the extent of the brain injury after I've made sections, but I don't think the cracked skull killed him. The bleeding, though, indicates how a big man like Froley, with both hands free, could have been strangled with a carrot. And while we'll of course check our findings here in the lab, I'm pretty sure we'll find that he did choke to death. The purple face, the tiny hemorrhages in the scalp and eyelids, the congestion of the——"

"So where do we go from here?" the detective asked. "What do I do while the Swami here is vacuum-cleaning Froley's pants?"

Dr. Coffee lit a cigarette while he pondered the question. At least it was a question that could be answered, which was something he could not say for a dozen other questions that had been buzzing the lobes of his brain for the past few days. For instance, should he proceed on the assumption that he was investigating a Communist plot? If so, why would a Communist agent, all of whom are supposed to be well schooled in the technique of sabotage, subversion and dissimulation, choose arsenic, a poison which could be easily and accurately detected for years after death, as the medium to kill a few thousand American soldiers, 6,500 at most—not even a division? And if it was indeed a plot—the death of Peggy Bayliss might possibly have been an accident, but the demise of Christopher Froley certainly was not—were the Communists killing each other off? Perhaps the answer to the first question would answer the second. Perhaps the stupidity of the agent entrusted with the initial coup was such that he had to be eliminated from the apparatus. Any man stupid enough to choose a poison as easily traceable as arsenic, and then put only a barrel of it into service for the anti-capitalistic, anti-pluto-demo-imperialist cause, could very easily be proven unworthy, and therefore marked for destruction. Froley, for instance, was perhaps no longer useful to dialectic materialism. Quite possible, if what Coffee had heard about Communist discipline were true.

On the other hand, if he got a different answer to his first



question, and started to reason on that basis in an opposite direction, the avenues of deduction were innumerable, but somehow less shadowy. He had, in fact, caught a glimpse down one of these avenues at lunchtime. He could not recognize the figure that stood at the end, but he thought the silhouette looked familiar. In any case—

"Are you officially assigned to this case, Max?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Sure, since today. Froley is definitely homicide. So that's me, officially."

"Good," the pathologist said. "Because I think you may have to go to New York Monday or Tuesday."

"Okay, you got a crystal ball, you can read the future, so you know what I'm going to do next week. But what do I do tomorrow?"

"Sleep," said Dr. Coffee. "Get up just in time to dunk mandel schnitten in your coffee. Tease your dog and take your kid sister for a walk, or vice versa. Take your mother for a ride with your siren going. Read the funny papers. Tomorrow is Sunday. Sunday is your day off. Remember?"

"I know," Ritter said. "So I'll probably be up here watching you make with the test tubes and the microscope, while the Swami goes through Froley's pockets with a suction nozzle—unless I find something good and juicy to get my teeth into."

"I've got one suggestion, Max," the pathologist said, "but I've hesitated to make it because I haven't thought the thing through yet. And besides, all the shops will be closed tomorrow. Do you need a writ or a warrant or something to get a pair of trousers out of a dry-cleaning establishment, if the trousers don't belong to you?"

"I won't need no writ," said Ritter. "I got very persuasive ways. What do you want, Doc?"

"First you'll have to find out who does the dry-cleaning for— Let's see . . . Papa Lenormand, of course; Quirk, Remington, Evans, Gilmore, Captain Kavlik, and— Well, that's enough to start with."

"What hat did you pull those names out of, Doc?"

"That's your list, Max."

"My list? Of what?"

"Those are the people including Quirk, who Quirk says were in and out of Evans's office the day Evans went home sick—the day the letter Evans says he wrote to the F.B.I. about Froley is supposed to have disappeared. Then I added Evans's name just in case he . . . well, had a lapse of memory."

"What about Bayliss?"

"If you can find Bayliss, we won't have to worry about *his* pants. I don't suppose you've any further news on him."

"No luck," Ritter said. "And when I find the cleaners, then what? Do you want their price list?"

"I want to know if any of these gents sent suits out to be cleaned today. And if so, get the clothes and bring them here for examination by our distinguished micro-chemist, Dr. Mookerji."

"Occidental custom of adorning nether portion of trouser-leg with upturned dust trap is indeed great aid to criminal investigation," said Dr. Mookerji.

Doris Hudson stuck her head inside the door to say: "You aren't starting anything complicated, are you, Doctor? Because don't forget I promised your wife you'd be only an hour late for dinner."

"I'll make it," Dr. Coffee said.

## XXIII

Gilmore dined on a tired Braunschweiger sandwich and a bottle of beer which he shared with an F.B.I. agent named Stapp. In view of the *Tribune* story, he would inevitably have the F.B.I. on his neck sooner or later anyway, so he had decided to take the initiative rather than wait to be summoned. He had called local headquarters and suggested a meeting at an obscure delicatessen in an unfamiliar part of town.

"Because," as he explained to Stapp, "whatever usefulness I may have to you guys would end the minute I was seen talking to any of you."

"You think you can be useful to us?"

"Yes."

"We don't go for amateurs much," Stapp said. "What's the angle?"

Gilmore told the story of Bayliss, Zina and the missing copy of *Émile*. He told it in detail, leaving out nothing.

When he had finished, the F.B.I. man looked at him stolidly as if waiting for more. Finally Stapp said:

"How do you know this Barbara Wall doesn't still have the book?"

"I don't know for certain, of course. It's up to me to find out."

"Why is it up to you?"

"Because you don't believe a word I say. Because I'm already guilty by association of half a dozen crimes, probably including the poisoning of the rations. Because until I can produce the book, or turn up Bayliss, or otherwise prove that my connection with this goddam mess is purely accidental and innocent, I'll never get another job anywhere in the country. And not

only do I resent being generally regarded as a skunk, but I take a very dim view of starving to death."

"What makes you think you have a better chance of digging up this stuff than we have?" Stapp asked.

"I've got contacts," said Gilmore, "people who will come to me, and won't come to you. At least one of them—I'm not sure who it is—is probably still very anxious to see me. Remember that somebody tried to knock me off the day *after* that book disappeared again. Why? The only reason I can think of is that this somebody believes I know the secrets of the book and can testify in place of Zina—in case Zina never shows up again. So if you guys will stay away from me for three or four days, I may get another chance to meet this person. Or persons. I think they may try again."

"Suppose this time they succeed?"

"That's a chance I'll have to take."

"I can't make any promises," Stapp said. "I can't make any commitments that we'll lay off you."

"Do you have any more questions?"

"No."

"Are you holding me now, after what I told you?"

"No," said the F.B.I. man. "Not yet."

"Then you go out first," Gilmore said. "Just in case somebody knows where you work. I'll wait here a while. I'll keep in touch."

Half an hour later Gilmore walked into the odorous murk of the Anchor Bar and ordered a beer. The one-eyed bartender glowered at him so he smiled.

"My girl been in yet tonight?" he asked.

"What girl?" the barman growled.

"The dame I was in here with last night."

"I never saw you before." The bartender drew the beer. "And if I don't see you again, that's okay, too."

"The dame with the pink dress—remember?" Gilmore persisted. "The dame that came back with another guy about an hour after she left with me—has she been in tonight?"

"You're drunk!" The barman snatched back the beer and poured it into the sink. "I don't serve drunks."

"The man she came back with—did he maybe leave a package for me? A package about so big—like a book? Did he say, 'Give this to Emile when he comes in'?"

"Goddammit, get out!" roared the barman. "I ain't going to lose my license serving goddam drunks. Get out of here before I throw you out." A glass crashed to the floor behind the bar.

Gilmore backed away from the bar, grinning.

"Thanks for the tip, Ed," he said. "See you in my dreams!" He forced himself to walk out very slowly.

He had not been home five minutes before the telephone rang.

"Thanks for the schizophrenic gardenias," Barbara said. "But tell me, Gil. Which corsage is for whom? Which one of me do you really want to get well?"

"Keep talking, so I can make up my mind," Gilmore replied.

"I've been feeling awful, Gil. Honestly, this isn't a diplomatic illness. I've had a splitting headache. And don't you dare say that it comes from my split personality. I guess I had one too many last night."

"You sure had one too many for my taste."

"Gil, you're being mean. I was talking about drinks."

"I know. But I wasn't."

"I'm sorry about last night. And about today, too." It was the old Barbara speaking, cool, calm and collected. Her regrets would put an inch of frost on a mint julep at ten paces. "I heard about you and Mr. Evans. I can't understand his acting that way. Is there anything I can do, Gil?"

"Sure," said Gilmore. "Go away with me for a few days."

Barbara did not reply, so Gilmore continued: "It would work out fine. We've both got excuses. I've got my vacation and you've got your headache. We can drive down to Kentucky. I know a man there who owns an aspirin farm."

"You're not serious, Gil?"

"Sure I am."



There was a slight pause. Then, "It's impossible, Gil. You know it's impossible."

"I know. It wouldn't look well, after that story in the *Tribune*. Besides, you'll have your hands full with the press, now that Gilmore has been removed from the Barzac lineup just as the big game is starting. I just thought I'd ask, that's all."

After a further exchange of trivialities, Gilmore hung up. He immediately dialed the *Tribune* and asked for the city editor.

"Hello, Ed. Bob Gilmore. It was damned white of you to try to reach me for a denial of that story about my kooch-dancer bride. . . . No, no. It's true enough, even though it's not exactly hot news at this late date. . . . Look, Ed. I know it's not ethical for you to divulge news sources, but I have a hunch you couldn't do it in this case anyhow. It was an anonymous tip by phone, wasn't it? . . . Sure, I know you checked afterward, but will you tell me this much: Was your anonymous tipster a man or a woman? A woman's voice? . . . Thanks, Ed."

Gilmore banged down the phone with a gesture that said Barbara was a louse. And yet, damn it, if she should call back to say that she had changed her mind about that weekend in Kentucky, he would probably be ass enough to jump at the chance—unless he called her now and told her that she was a louse and that if he ever saw her again he would put insecticide in her daiquiris. He started counting to ten, so that his voice would be calm and collected when he read her the riot act. When he got to seven, the phone rang again.

Frankie Froley was on the wire, thanking him for the flowers.

Gilmore remembered he had enclosed no card. "What flowers?" he asked.

Frankie giggled. "I know you sent them, Gil," she said. "They were to me and they were red roses. Everybody else sends white flowers or pale colors—and to Chris. I guess you'd like to know what happened last night."

"I think I know, Frankie. You were with Bayliss."

"Gill How did you know?"

"The Great Gilmore knows all, sees all. Where are you, Frankie? In jail?"

"Silly! The police have been very nice. The F.B.I., too. They're not going to ask any more questions until after Chris is buried."

"When is the funeral, Frankie?"

"Oh, there won't be any regular services. Chris didn't believe in anything. But the local is taking care of everything and they think Chris ought to be laid out for a few days so everybody can say good-bye to him. Everybody's being very nice. I'm at the funeral parlors now. Aren't you coming down, Gil?"

"Why yes, I guess so."

"Maybe we'll get a chance to talk. I can't tell you now, Gil, but it's about last night. It's important—for you."

"I'll come by tomorrow," Gilmore said.

There was plenty to read in the Sunday papers, and there was no longer any question of skipping paragraphs during breakfast in the garden. Old Mrs. Gilmore had caught the bulletins on the radio and demanded to be kept abreast of latest developments in what the headline writers had now dubbed the GRIM CANNERY MYSTERY, or, when space was tight, SOUP PLANT DEATHS or RED PLOT.

The death of Christopher Froley was of course the eight-column banner on page one. The Coroner had announced—on the basis of Dr. Coffee's autopsy, which was not mentioned—that there was no doubt about Froley's having been murdered. The publicity stills of Mrs. Froley as Carrot Queen shared prominence with the revelation that Froley had been a Communist. Furthermore, Washington correspondents had got the F.B.I. to admit that the ex-husband of Peggy Bayliss, "first victim of the Red conspiracy at the Barzac plant," was also highly placed in the Party's Midwest *Apparat*, and was being sought for questioning.

"I'll bet that was the man who came to see you Friday

night," Mrs. Gilmore interrupted. "I'd recognize his voice, if he ever showed up."

Gilmore's gaze wandered about the garden, from the wrecked clump of Matilija poppies to the box hedge in the rear. He asked: "Do we have any carrots in the kitchen garden this year, Victoria?"

"You know very well we do. We— No, that's right, you weren't home for dinner Friday night. I had Miss Smith pull up a few that were big enough to eat. She fixed them with a cream sauce. They were tender and nice. . . . Where are you going, son, on that vacation they moved up on you?"

"Nowhere," Gilmore said.

"Why don't you telephone to Blue Lake and reserve a cabin for yourself?"

"Why Blue Lake?"

"It's cool up there, and the people up there are friendly. People around here seem to be getting downright unfriendly, and they're making it hotter and hotter for you because you happened to get mixed up with a whirling she-dervish that time your brains went down on you like the mumps. Of course, if you want to hang around and take it flat on your back—"

"I'm not going to Blue Lake," Gilmore said, "and I'm not lying down for it, either. It's not too hot for me around here. If you want, I'll get a cabin for you and Miss Smith. I'm staying here."

"Good boy." Mrs. Gilmore chuckled. "So am I." She leaned across the breakfast table to touch her son's forehead. "Go inside and take your shower," she ordered. "You're sweating like a nervous bridegroom."

Shortly after lunch, a police car stopped in front of the Gilmore bungalow to discharge a delegation consisting of Max Ritter, Dr. Coffee, Dr. Mookerji and Professor Treet of the Botany Department, Northbank College.

Dr. Coffee explained that microscopic examination of dusts from the late Chris Froley's clothing had revealed pollen and fragments of stamens and pistils which Professor Treet had

identified as coming from the Matilija poppy. And since the professor insisted that the only Matilija poppies within a thirty-mile radius of Northbank were growing in the Gilmore garden, they had come to take a look.

"At least they used to grow here," said Professor Treet, "although I haven't seen them since your father passed away, Gilmore. Will it disturb your mother if we putter about in your back garden?"

"She'll be glad to see an old colleague of father's," Gilmore said.

"And while the doc and the professor are making with the flowers, Gilmore," said Ritter, "the Swami and I will give the once-over to your car."

"I thought you already gave my jalopy the many-times-over," Gilmore said.

"That was Friday," the detective explained. "And today is Sunday. On Sundays we always scrutinize the trunk compartment."

"Then you'll want my keys."

"We got our own resources." Ritter jingled an assortment of master keys as big as a bunch of grapes. "Come on, Swami. Bring your bottles and your brushes."

Gilmore accompanied the pathologist and the botanist to the back of the house. Professor Treet went right to the clump of giant poppies, made admiring remarks, and asked permission to clip a few of the big white-and-yellow blooms for comparative microscopic study.

Dr. Coffee had quickly spotted the vegetable patch, just a few paces beyond the poppies, and was soon bending over the feathery green rows of carrots. Gilmore followed him.

"I see you've been eating carrots," the pathologist said. "Mind if I pull one—as a souvenir?"

"Help yourself," Gilmore said. "Think it'll match the one that strangled Froley?"

"I'm afraid we can't match carrots, but if necessary we can make comparative spectrograms of the soil of your garden and

the soil fragments clinging to the carrot found in Froley's throat. The autopsy also revealed soil fragments and pollen in Froley's larynx. So it looks very much as if the man might have been killed right here in your back yard, Gilmore."

"My mother," Gilmore said, "would probably consider it proper retribution for tramping down the canyon poppies."

At the end of the afternoon Gilmore drove to the Midtown Mortuary Chapel.

Union officials of the Northbank local had spared no expense to give their late shop steward a lush send-off to the Hereafter. Froley lay in state in an expensive casket in Midtown's second largest chapel (the largest had a religious motif in its stained-glass windows and was therefore unsuitable) while an invisible organist played soft chords continuously. The cloying sweetness of many flowers perfumed the hush, and dozens of men and women filed past the coffin or stood in whispering groups.

Not all the dozens, Gilmore noted, were members of the local or fellow workers from Barzac. He recognized three plain-clothes men from the Northbank police force, and he suspected that some of the others were F.B.I. agents. Gilmore was going to have a hard time talking privately to Frankie Froley.

Black was very becoming to Frankie. Some specialist in mourning had done an expert rush job on tailoring a few yards of black voile to her ample curves. She was paler than usual, and the pallor of her face made her eyes seem larger and her bangs darker. When she saw Gilmore, she came toward him with one arm outstretched, took his hand, and led him directly to the flower-banked casket. Her theory, obviously, was that the forces of law and order would respect her grief at least to the extent of allowing her a few minutes in private at the side of her deceased husband.

"About the other night," she whispered, "how did you know I was fibbing when I said I was phoning from home?"

"Because I talked to the cops who were watching your house.



They said nobody had been in or out all night. You went back to the Anchor to meet Bayliss, didn't you?"

Frankie nodded. "I was supposed to keep you there till he came, but you were in such a hurry to rush away that I couldn't do anything. Bayliss made me promise I wouldn't tell you that he was going to join us. So I had to go back and tell him what happened. He still wanted to see you, and told me to make a date. But while I was phoning you up, two men came in the Anchor and Bayliss thought they were watching us. We couldn't move till after they left, and they stayed for over an hour. Then we went to the drug store, but you'd left already."

"Where's Bayliss now?"

"I don't know. He had to leave right after that. He wanted to talk to you, but he couldn't stay around any longer. So he wrote you a letter."

"Frankie, are you making all this up?"

"Honest, Gil. He gave me the letter. I got it hidden—but good. He said I should give it to you privately as soon as he has a head start. He'll send me word when I can give it to you. Then I'll let you know."

Gilmore shook his head incredulously. He said nothing, however, because one of Max Ritter's detectives was sauntering toward him.

He looked down at the coffin for the first time. The undertaker had made a good-looking corpse of Froley. Cosmetics had wiped out the mottled purple of asphyxia. And Dr. Coffee had done an expert job of replacing the top of the skull after the autopsy; there was no dark ridge across the forehead. . . .

"Hello, Brody," Gilmore said to the plain-clothes man. "Looks like your man won't get away from you this time."

## XXIV

During the next forty-eight hours, latest news of the Affaire Barzac seemed to emanate chiefly from Wall Street. F.B.I. agents and G-2 officers in Northbank were singularly uncommunicative. Lieutenant Max Ritter was out of town, Dr. Coffee referred all queries to the Barzac plant, and Barzac officials restricted information to a daily press conference at which queries were channeled through Barbara Wall, to be answered next day at five. But from the New York Stock Exchange the Barzac news was brisk.

The weekend story of the Froley murder did Barzac shares no good, and they opened at 36, a loss of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  points over the Saturday closing. By midafternoon Monday they hit an all-time low of 31, down  $4\frac{1}{2}$ —almost half their value—from Friday's opening, but climbed to  $32\frac{1}{2}$  at the close as a result of profit-taking. Tuesday's opening was 32, and the shares remained steady most of the day. There was considerable trading in Barzac, and the stock climbed a few half points during the day as a result of heavy buying. Gilmore found it all very interesting, but not nearly as pertinent as, for instance, a telephone call from Frankie Froley would have been.

Gilmore had not really expected to hear from Frankie. She was, he had decided, an arrant fantasist, pathologically unable to distinguish her own inventions from reality. True, she had led him to George Bayliss's address, but the rest of her brief relationship with Gilmore had been so festooned with extravagant imagination and downright fabrication, that he could not believe that Bayliss had written a letter to him, or, if he had, that he would have entrusted it to Frankie. He was more than a little surprised, therefore, just forty-eight hours after the inter-

view in the funeral parlors, to pick up his ringing telephone and hear Frankie's voice.

"Gil, it's come! I've got the word!" Her voice was as excited as on the night she had been crowned Carrot Queen.

"What word?" The tone of oracular exaltation vibrating in the receiver made Gilmore vaguely uneasy.

"From You-know-who," Frankie said. "The person we were talking about. I've got that letter for you."

"Oh, yes," said Gilmore. Superman again. Or the Man from Mars. Or Prisoner's Base. He said, "What must the owner do to redeem it?"

"They're breathing down my neck, Gil," Frankie panted, "but I think I've out-smarted all of them. I'm in the clear now. I could meet you in twenty minutes at that place."

"What place, Frankie? The drug store?"

"No, the other place. The place you didn't like the smell of, but you drank beer."

Gilmore's nostrils quivered reminiscently. "Okay, Frankie. I get it. In twenty minutes."

He reached the Anchor in seventeen. The aromatic qualities of the riverside bar were not greatly different by daylight, except perhaps there were fewer overtones of working corduroys; the smells were more reminiscent of the locker-room of a Turnverein after the special summer classes for middle-aged executives. The same one-eyed bartender was on duty. He snapped his bar towel at Gilmore in wordless inquiry.

"A small beer," Gilmore said.

He nursed his beer for ten minutes, watching the door. No sign of Frankie. When a telephone rang somewhere, he jumped.

The bartender ambled toward a phone booth tucked away between the empty free-lunch counter and a dark stairway that spiraled mysteriously downward out of sight. After five minutes, the *bong-bong* of dropped coins announced that the one-eyed Ganymede was making another call. It was a good ten minutes before he emerged, dripping perspiration. Automati-

cally he filled the glasses of the regular customers, but hesitated in front of Gilmore.

"The same," Gilmore said.

Ganymede drew the beer and decapitated the foam with a wooden spatula. He was making change for Gilmore when the phone rang again.

Gilmore spilled his beer and fidgeted while he watched the barman vanish once more into the phone booth. He had time to drain his glass before the second phone call came to an end. Still no Frankie.

The barman's single eye stared accusingly at Gilmore, as though he were to blame for the temperature and humidity inside the booth.

"The same," Gilmore said. But the phone rang a third time before the bartender had a chance to reach the spigot.

"Damn," said Ganymede, diving for the steam-bath cabinet. He re-appeared almost instantly to announce, "Bill Moore!"

Nobody moved.

"You!" Ganymede focused his one glittering eye on Gilmore. "Bill Moore. The phone. A dame. Pick it up!"

The folding glass door shuddered as Gilmore shut himself into the booth. "Hello, Frankie."

"Sorry," said Barbara Wall's voice. "This isn't Frankie, Gil. But I've got a message from your Carrot Queen, so listen carefully. She says it's important to you, but it sounds like double talk to me."

"Say, what is this, Barbara—?"

"She says," Barbara continued, "that she's been trying to get you at this number for fifteen minutes, but the line's always busy, and she can't stay where she is any longer for reasons that she says you'll understand. Also she can't meet you where she promised to meet you for the same reasons. So she phoned me to pass on the message. She says she has that letter from You-know-who, and that it's red hot. So if you can get to No. 1 Warehouse in ten minutes, she'll give it to you. Just walk around

inside, and she'll make contact. I hope you understand all this, Gil, because I don't."

"Look, Barbie, if this is a gag——"

"Be yourself, Gil. I don't know where you are or whose number I'm calling. Does anybody but your pal, the Widow Froley, know where you're supposed to be?"

*She's right, Gilmore reflected. Only Frankie knows I'm at the Anchor. Unless Frankie has told someone else—such as Bayliss.*

"I'm just doing you a favor," Barbara continued, "by relaying a message from your girl friend. I'm glad you appreciate it."

"Thanks, Barbie. I apologize. Will you do me another favor?"

"Anything within reason, Gil."

"Then wait an hour before you tip off the *Tribune* about what you've just told me."

"Of course, Gil, for you, dear. You're so sweet." There was an icy pause. "I wish you happy contacts," Barbara said, and hung up.

Gilmore lost no time in starting for Barzac's No. 1 Warehouse. *I should hope not to see you around the plant*, Evans had said. The hell with Evans. He could turn his head the other way. . . .

The late afternoon traffic was heavy, but Gilmore reached the plant in just under ten minutes. He had trouble parking, however. No. 1 Warehouse was right across the street from Barzac's Main Building, and several minutes' walk from the employees' parking lot. Gilmore cruised the intervening blocks without finding a hospitable curb, so he turned back and left his car in a no-parking spot in front of the executive entrance.

He hurried across the street, under the shadow of the covered bridges that spanned the thoroughfare, a twin Bridge of Sighs, housing the mechanical conveyor that carried the soup cartons from the upper floors of the Main Building to the top of the warehouse.

"Evening, Mr. Gilmore." The guard at the entrance to No. 1 Warehouse had evidently not been told that Gilmore was persona non grata about the plant these days.



Gilmore stepped into the vast dusk of the cavernous interior. He walked down the aisles between pyramids of cartons, toward the cardboard mountains beyond, hundreds of thousands of cans of soup, reaching up into the half darkness, waiting to be loaded into the freight cars that pulled into the railway siding on the far side of the warehouse.

"Frankie," he called softly.

There was no answer but the voice of the warehouse, a special murmuring sound, softer than the din of the kitchens, a lonely voice that was almost lost in the vastness of the hangar-like structure. The soup cartons were rumbling across the twilight under the roof of the warehouse, pitching from their conveyor belts into spiral cages, twisting and turning as they cascaded down out of the gloom, spinning the rollers that lined the spirals.

Somewhere at the foot of the spirals men were working, perhaps a hundred yards, perhaps only fifty yards away, stacking the cases, but Gilmore could not see them. He wondered how Frankie Froley had expected him to find her in this maze. He had not realized until now, when he was seeking someone, that it was impossible to see more than a few yards in any direction, once away from the main avenues between the great pyramids. It was a labyrinth of cardboard walls. . . .

He began threading the dim maze. Frankie must have had some plan in mind when she suggested No. 1 Warehouse as a meeting place. Probably she was in the vicinity of the plant when she had phoned to Barbara to relay the message that she could not keep her rendezvous at the Anchor. Obviously, she had discovered that she was being followed again—which would explain her choice of the warehouse. Knowing the topography of No. 1, she would see the possibility of losing her follower among the shadowy walls and towers of stacked cartons. And once free again, she could watch for Gilmore from some hidden point of vantage. That was probably it. Frankie was doubtless waiting in some corner that commanded the approaches to the main entrance.

Gilmore started his methodic exploration of the sinuous by-ways nearest the entrance. He walked slowly, peering into the murk, stopping occasionally. At the sixth stop, he did not start walking again immediately. A sudden numbing doubt seemed to paralyze his legs. Suppose Frankie was not waiting in some dark corner for him? Or if she was waiting, suppose she was not alone? Suppose he had sauntered blithely into a trap? Suppose Bayliss for reasons of his own was preparing to remedy the little matter of elimination which the dynamite had failed to accomplish, the day of Peggy's funeral . . . ?

Well, there was no turning back now. It would not be the first mistake Gilmore had made in his life; he could do no more than take every precaution that it should not be his last. He thrust his hands into his coat pockets, although he knew he would not feel the comforting touch of metal. He resumed his zigzagging between the beetling cliffs of cardboard.

At the next jog he stumbled, caught himself, took a long step to avoid falling on the soft, yielding object that had briefly anchored his instep. He turned—and looked down at the inert figure of Frances Froley.

Frankie was lying on her side, her silken legs parted scissor-wise, and her black voile mourning skirt billowed up about her white thighs. One high-heeled shoe lay two yards away, as though it had been kicked off. Her face was half obscured by the dark disorder of her hair. The top of her dress had been ripped down the front, exposing most of her bosom. Gilmore could guess where she had been carrying the letter—if there had been a letter.

"Frankie," he said.

There was no response. He bent down to touch her bare shoulder. It was warm, but of course it should be if she had telephoned Barbara less than half an hour before. He brushed the hair from her face. There was a long, dark, ugly welt on her forehead. He slipped one arm under her shoulders. He could detect no sign of breathing.

"Frankie," he repeated.

Her closed eyelids did not move. He leaned closer, touched her parted lips.

Suddenly he stiffened, straightened up. Something hard and round had been jabbed against the small of his back.

"Hello, Bayliss," Gilmore did not turn his head. "Aren't you going to thank me for being such a sap—for making things nice and easy for you?"

"Don't move your hands," ordered a voice behind him. It was a low-pitched, well-modulated voice, scarcely more than a whisper, but it spoke with the cold authority of command. "Sorry it has to end like this, Gilmore."

## XXV .

When Barbara Wall hung up after relaying Frances Froley's message to Gilmore, she made a face at the telephone. Then she glanced at her miniature wristwatch, noted that it was already past five o'clock, and began the ritual of powdering her nose and retouching her lips and cheeks. With curled fingers she verified the edges of her hair-do, took a final look into the mirror of her compact, and pronounced herself satisfactory.

As she emerged from her eighth-floor cubicle, her secretary said: "Mr. Quirk called, Miss Wall. He said the reporters are all ready waiting in the green conference room. And Mr. Remington just came by but——"

"I'm late, June," Barbara said. "But you won't have to wait for me. Go on home now."

The green conference room was crowded with newspapermen. Not only were the Northbank reporters out in force, but there were trained seals from all the wire services and from a number of Chicago, New York, and Cleveland papers. It was an imposing press conference, and Barbara handled it imposingly. She made a smiling entrance and took her seat at the head of the long table with complete self-assurance.

"Let me say right at the start, boys," she said, "that there are absolutely no developments since yesterday. But if you have any questions, I'll try to answer them for you."

"What's Max Ritter doing in New York?" asked the *Journal*.

"Lieutenant Ritter works for the police department, not Barzac. I suggest you ask the police department that question."

"Where's Bob Gilmore?"

"On vacation."

"Does he get the bounce when he gets back, or has he already got the bad news?" asked the *Tribune* reporter.

"I don't know what plans the Barzac management has for Mr. Gilmore," Barbara said. "I'll be glad to inquire and fill you in tomorrow."

"Why did you tip off the papers about Gilmore being married to that dancer—so he'd get the bounce and you'd fall into his job?" The *Tribune* man laughed knowingly.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Barbara coldly.

"Sure you do," the *Tribune* man persisted. "You're the one who called up the *Trib* the other night and spilled the beans about Gilmore and the Moroccan dancer and that French book."

"I," said Barbara categorically, "did nothing of the kind. You're completely mistaken. Completely."

"Look, sister, I'm the one you were talking to. I'd know your voice in a million—the way you pronounce 'Gilmore,' for instance. You have a very distinctive R."

"You say I called the *Tribune*, personally, Friday night?"

"Sure," said the *Tribune* reporter. "That is, some man called the city desk, and said he had a woman with a very interesting angle on the Barzac story. The city desk passed the call to me, and you came on with the story of Gilmore and Zina or whatever her name was. You never did give me the spelling on that name, and we had to get it from New York. Why didn't you answer my questions, anyhow? Why did you hang up so suddenly?"

"I wasn't on the phone, I tell you."

"Tut, tut, sister," said the *Tribune*. "You began by saying, 'Didn't you know about Bob Gilmore's mysterious wife? I thought everybody knew he was married to a belly-dancer named Zina Chergui.' And when I asked you to spell it, you went right on talking. You said, 'Zina was a refugee from Spanish Morocco, and the romance developed out of a book he brought her from France—a copy of Rousseau's *Émile*—so some of his friends kidded him about marrying an underground network. They weren't really serious then, but—'"

"Are there any more questions?" Barbara interrupted. She had paled abruptly, and she clasped her slender fingers tightly



together on the table in front of her so they would not tremble. She even managed a smile, although it was a taut, grim smile. Before anyone could answer, she was on her feet. She nodded graciously. "Then that's all today, boys."

"Hey, wait a minute," said a reporter at the end of the table. "What about—?"

"I think," Barbara broke in, "that I can promise you an important break in your story within the next hour. You may stay here if you want. In any event, I suggest you keep in touch with Mr. Evans."

Barbara stalked out with all the dignity she could muster. She continued stalking all the way across the eighth floor, and stalked right past Mr. Evans's secretary.

"Just a moment, Miss Wall," the secretary said. "Mr. Evans is in conference. If you'll just wait—"

But Barbara didn't wait. She burst into the holy of holies to interrupt the general manager in the midst of a sentence he was addressing to Mr. Quirk.

"Mr. Evans," she announced. "I'm quitting."

"Sit down, please, Miss Wall. I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I'm resigning. I'm leaving Barzac. I'm through."

"Please sit down, Miss Wall. You're upset about something. . . ."

"Upset?" Barbara laughed hysterically. "That's the master understatement of all time."

"I was just telling Mr. Quirk," said Mr. Evans, trying desperately to establish an atmosphere of calm and reason, "that you were acquitting yourself extremely well in the position of responsibility which was suddenly thrust upon you. You surely can't think of leaving us in the midst of a major crisis?"

"Can't I?" Barbara shouted. "Well, I'm doing it. In fact, I've done it. I'm washed up."

"Miss Wall, if there's anything wrong—"

"Wrong? Don't make me laugh. I don't suppose there's anything you can do about it now, but there's plenty I can do, and I'm doing it. I'm not going to be played for a sucker. I won't

be used to do somebody else's dirty work. And if you don't know what I mean, you're stupider than I think. Maybe you are just stupid—as stupid as I've been—but I doubt it. Anyhow, that's your problem. My own problem is to guard whatever integrity I've got left—to try to get back what I've lost."

Calvin Quirk put in his two cents' worth. "Think it over for a fortnight, Miss Wall," he said. "You can give us your two weeks' notice now if you like, and at the end of that time if you decide——"

"I've decided now!" shouted Barbara. "Don't you understand? Now. As of today. The day before yesterday. Last week. I've quit."

Barbara stormed out, her cheeks flushed. Mr. Evans and Mr. Quirk looked at each other. Neither had ever heard Barbara raise her voice before. And neither, obviously, could understand why an attractive and ambitious young girl would want to throw a plush-lined job in their faces with only a cryptic explanation.

Barbara was still pink with anger when she reached Bart Remington's office, four doors away.

"Mr. Remington's not here," his secretary said. "Didn't you see him? He left for your office fifteen minutes ago. I thought he'd still be with you."

"I must have missed him," Barbara said. "I——" She stopped short, remembering something her own secretary had said. The angry flush disappeared from her cheeks. Her expression changed. Her eyes were frightened.

She hurried to her own cubicle. Her secretary had gone. She picked up the phone and called Captain Kavlik of the Guard Force.

"This is Barbara Wall, Captain," she said confidently, just as though she had not just severed her connection with Barzac forever. "Will you take enough men to No. 1 Warehouse to watch every exit, right away? Tell them to let nobody in or out till I get there. Nobody. I'll explain when I see you, Captain. I'll be at the main entrance in five minutes."

She next called the police station, but was informed that Lieutenant Ritter was still out of town. He was due back this evening. Any minute, in fact . . .

Barbara dialed Pasteur Hospital and asked for Dr. Coffee.

The pathology laboratory of Pasteur Hospital was a bustling, studious and jubilant place late that same afternoon. The bustle involved the entire staff; the study was largely the province of Dr. Coffee, checking the results of numerous tests performed by his Hindu resident, Dr. Motilal Mookerji; the jubilation was, for the moment, an exclusive manifestation on the part of Dr. Mookerji.

Dr. Mookerji was busily waddling back and forth between his workbench and Dr. Coffee's desk, carrying such objects as green-stained blotting paper, test tubes, and glass slides to be slipped under the pathologist's microscope.

"Am now ultra-positive," the Hindu declared, "that suspicious substance recovered from edge of tire-tool is fatal residue from blood of unfortunate ex-member of human race. Please observe."

Dr. Coffee glanced at the greenish stains on the blotting paper. "You know, of course, Doctor," he said, "that the benzidine test is not conclusive. Fresh fruit will give you the same reaction as fresh blood."

"Precisely," Dr. Mookerji agreed. "Therefore, to avoid confusion caused by homicidal murderer smacking tire-tool against ripe cantaloupe instead of head of deceased Froley have double-cross-checked with Teichmann test." He slid an oblong of thin glass under the nose of Dr. Coffee's microscope and switched on the light beam. "Kindly observe brownish hemin crystals," he said. "Medium power, please."

"You've got the crystals, all right," said Dr. Coffee, squinting into the binocular lenses. "Are you sure, Doctor, that no fabric has come into contact with your stains? Because indigo dyes will also give you similar rhombic crystals."

"Quite," said the Hindu, changing the slide. "Consequently

have triple-cross-checked by means of suspension in saline solution, which allows perception of red cells, via microscope. Do you confirm findings, Doctor Sahib?"

Dr. Coffee gave a noncommittal grunt. He was still twisting the focusing knobs when Max Ritter entered the laboratory, dropped his traveling bag on the floor, and delivered a friendly but enthusiastic slap to that portion of Doris Hudson which protruded beyond the edge of the stool on which she sat while labeling paraffin blocks. An outraged squeal from Doris made the pathologist look up.

"Max!" he said. "I didn't expect you before tonight."

"I made an earlier plane," the detective said. "Get my wire?"

"I didn't quite understand your code," said Dr. Coffee, "but I gathered you were quite pleased with yourself."

"You have no doubt been enjoying successful manhunting, Leftenant," said Dr. Mookerji.

"On my side, it's buttoned up tight," Ritter said. "The guy's got seven different brokerage accounts, and he's been buying Barzac shares like mad with all of 'em since yesterday noon—on margin, naturally. The brokers all had different instructions so they wouldn't all be buying at once and send the stock back up too fast. What gives in this precinct?"

"We've been rolling up votes for your candidate while you were away, Max," Dr. Coffee said. "In fact, I think Dr. Mookerji's got enough evidence to elect your man to the chair."

"Nice going," Ritter said. "Where'd you get it, Swami? From the man's pants?"

Dr. Mookerji's pink turban described negative arcs. "Excepting for trousers of late deceased Mr. Froley," he said, "search of clothing proved most unfruitful."

"Checking the automobiles did it," Dr. Coffee said. "Dustings from one trunk compartment gave us not only pollen and fragments from the Matilija poppy, which pretty well establishes the car as having carried Froley's body to the cannery, but it also gave us a blood-stained tire-tool. I don't know yet if

we'll be able to get enough cells from the stain to type the blood, but——"

"Telephone, Doctor," Doris Hudson interrupted. "A Miss Wall from the Barzac cannery on two. She says it's urgent."

Dr. Coffee said "Yes!" into the phone a few times, then: "He just came back. Certainly. I'll bring him along." Turning to Ritter, he said gravely: "Better call your shop and get a few prowl cars headed for the Barzac plant, Max. The soup is boiling over."



## XXVI

A man about to die, according to legend, reviews his entire life in his last remaining seconds. Gilmore was aware of the imminence of death, but his thoughts went back no further than ten seconds—or was it ten weeks or ten years?—when he had felt the muzzle of a gun jammed against his spine. Even the shock of surprised recognition when the man with the gun had spoken dissolved instantly into the greater immediacy. His entire consciousness seemed concentrated on the small circle of pressure against his back, a circle that could explode at the slightest contraction of a murderer's finger, to blow him into eternity.

When the explosion did not come immediately, Gilmore's awareness expanded to include a great lump of cold in the pit of his stomach, a great and humiliating weakness in all his joints, and a great dryness of his throat and mouth. The dryness touched off an overweening desire for a tall, stiff drink, which in turn made him think incongruously of the six cans of beer he had put into his refrigerator that morning. Then, all in the space of seconds, he felt terribly ashamed of having been on the point of surrender without even putting up a fight. He leaned back a trifle against the gun at his back.

"Listen, Stupid," he said, when he could liberate his tongue from the roof of his mouth. "If you pull that trigger, you're sunk. They'll find you with a gun in your hand and two more corpses to explain."

He leaned back a little more, trying to remember the *judo* tricks a tough sergeant had once taught him in North Africa.

"Who'll find me?" asked the man with the gun.

Gilmore doubled up abruptly, so that the muzzle of the gun was suddenly pushing against nothing. The man with the gun,

thrown off balance, pitched forward. Gilmore sprang, half turned to grab the gun. The muzzle spewed flame and thunder into the half light of the warehouse. Hot metal burned Gilmore's hand, and his muscles relaxed involuntarily. The gun barrel tore through his fingers and immediately crashed down across the top of his skull.

Gilmore was on his knees once more. He raised his hands automatically to protect his head. The steel club smashed through his fingers, struck again and again. Gilmore folded quietly, his ears ringing with a queer, irrational cacophony. He seemed to hear Barbara's voice, the *thwack-thwack* of a woodchopper, the faint howl of sirens, and the eternal rumble of conveyor belts. . . . The ensuing silence was very dark indeed.

Captain Kavlik barred the entrance to Warehouse No. 1. "Sorry, Miss Wall," he said.

Barbara Wall may have been a small girl, but indignation added several inches to her stature, without detracting from her calm self-assurance. "Haven't you posted your men at all the doors?" she demanded archly.

"Oh, yes," Kavlik said, "but I've had new orders. I had to report this to the front office, you know. Routine."

At this moment Mr. Quirk materialized from nowhere. "Captain," he said. "Mr. Evans has instructed me to warn you that you are not to take orders from Miss Wall. Even when Miss Wall was a Barzac employee, she was not authorized to give orders to the Guard Force. As of this moment, she is not an employee. She resigned within the hour."

"Let me go in, Captain. Please," Barbara begged. "Mr. Quirk may not care if he has murder on his hands, but *you* want to sleep nights, Captain, I'm sure."

While Kavlik was toying with the idea of *lèse majesté*, a process which seemed to affect the relationship of his lips to his false teeth, a police car screamed to a stop in front of the warehouse.

Before its siren had growled into silence, two uniformed policemen jumped out with guns drawn.

"Where's the trouble, Mac?" said the first policeman, to an obligato of more sirens rising to a crescendo in the near background.

"There's no trouble," said Mr. Quirk quickly. "You've been summoned by error."

Mr. Quirk's pronouncement was punctuated by the sound of a shot—a hollow detonation whose humming echo was lost in the spaces of the warehouse.

"What was that?" the policeman demanded.

"Probably a carton falling from the conveyor belt," said Mr. Quirk, nervously watching the arrival of two more police cars. "It's quite a drop, you know. Thirty feet, at least."

"That was gunfire," said the policeman. Max Ritter and Dr. Coffee got out of the second car. "You're just in time, Lieutenant. The shooting's started."

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant," said Mr. Quirk, "but unless you have a search warrant—"

"Go bake a cake," said Ritter. "Henry, you take the door. Kavlik, you know the joint, so you'd better go in with us. Jordan—"

With no more than a dozen words, Ritter had deployed his forces, and the search was on. It was ended a few minutes later by a shout from Captain Kavlik.

People converged on the shout, scurrying through the ant runs between the cardboard pyramids—guards, policemen, warehousemen, sundry Barzac personnel. A circle formed about Dr. Coffee, as he worked in the light of Kavlik's flash lamp.

Bart Remington elbowed his way through the perimeter. He stared first at Frances Froley, still sprawled on the cement floor, then at Gilmore, propped against a stack of cartons, his face streaked with blood.

"Where'd you come from, Remington?" Ritter demanded.

"From my office. I heard something had happened in the warehouse. . . ."

"Get these two people across the street to the infirmary right away," Dr. Coffee said.

"I'll phone for stretchers," Remington said.

"You stay right here, Remington," Ritter said. "You, too, Quirk. Kavlik will get the stretchers."

Barbara had edged through the little crowd until she stood next to Remington. She stared at him with hard, accusing eyes until he turned to look at her. "Where's the letter, Bart?" she asked.

"What letter?"

"You were standing outside my office, Bart, while I was talking to Gil on the phone a little while ago." Barbara spoke with a dry, lifeless voice. "The partition is thin, and the acoustics are good. You heard me relay Mrs. Froley's message about the letter that was red hot, and you rushed over here to the warehouse before Gil could get here. You—you skunk!"

"Now Barbara, wait a minute——"

"We can't wait, Remington." Ritter snaked a pair of chain cuffs from his hip pocket. "You and me have got business downtown. The charge will be murder in the first degree—that's Froley; conspiracy, aiding and abetting murder—that's Peggy Bayliss; and assault with a deadly weapon with intent to commit murder—that's Mrs. Froley and Gilmore. And if that ain't enough, we've still got that dynamite and a few odds and ends. Then the Army might want——"

"You've got to let me call my attorney," Remington mopped the perspiration from his white face. "It's my constitutional right!"

"The Constitution," said Dr. Coffee, "isn't going to be much help in explaining away the blood on the tire-tool, or the pollen and poppy fragments we found in the trunk compartment of your shiny new Cadillac that you used to cart Froley's body to the cannery from Gilmore's garden, where you killed him."

"Come on, Remington," Ritter said.

## XXVII

Gilmore was sitting up in bed, arguing. "If the X-rays don't show any cracks in my skull," he protested, "why can't I go home?"

"You had a slight concussion," Dr. Coffee replied. "You're going to stay in the hospital until we're sure no secondary symptoms will develop."

"It's a hell of a place to spend a vacation," Gilmore said.

"You can have visitors," Max Ritter said. "There's one outside now. That dame from your soup foundry, Barbara Wall."

"I don't want to see her."

"She's easy on the eyes."

"She sold me down the river."

"Don't be a dope," the detective said. "She saved you from getting your fool brains spattered all over the floor of that warehouse. Am I right, Doc?"

Dr. Coffee nodded. "Miss Wall sent out the SOS that brought the rescue forces to the warehouse in time to interrupt Remington."

"She sold me down the river," Gilmore repeated. "Three times. In my league, three strikes is out."

"Look, Gilmore," Ritter pleaded. "As a special favor to me, will you see this dame? She won't give up the letter because it's addressed to you."

"Oh yes. The letter I went to the warehouse to get from Frankie Froley, only Remington got there first. Did Barbara rig that one, too?"

"Miss Wall found the letter tucked between two cartons, not far from where Remington waylaid you," Dr. Coffee said. "Obviously he intended to go back and get it later, after the dust



had settled. Max wants to turn it over to the prosecutor with the rest of the evidence, so if you'd just co-operate. . . ."

"All right, let her come in," Gilmore said.

He had never seen Barbara Wall embarrassed before. At least she seemed embarrassed as she walked to his bedside and looked at him shyly from under her upswept lashes. She had a package under her arm.

"I've come to throw myself on the mercy of the court," Barbara said.

"What have you done now?" Gilmore demanded.

"The same old thing," she said. "That story about you and your North African wife again."

"That's right. You did phone it to the *Tribune*."

"I didn't, Gil. But I take full blame for it, because I told the story to Bart Remington several weeks ago. It wasn't very discreet, I know, but I guess I was peeved at you for ignoring me when I came back into your life. Besides, the thing is a matter of public record in New York and Reno. And then I never dreamed Remington wasn't to be trusted."

"Stop apologizing," Gilmore said. "How did it get to the *Tribune*?"

"Bart Remington must have recorded every word I said. It was an old trick of his, with his wire recorder. He'd plant a microphone in the room while he was entertaining, and then amuse or embarrass his guests by playing back their small talk later. In my case he must have edited the wire so it made a coherent story. Then he called the *Tribune* and let my voice dictate the story."

"Why?" Gilmore asked.

"Part of his campaign to drive Barzac shares down a few more points, I guess. And he used my voice to keep himself out of the picture. When the *Tribune* reporter began quoting my words back at me at the press conference this afternoon, I realized what had happened, and I immediately—"

"Okay, Barbie, you're forgiven," Gilmore said. "What about

reading me the letter? This bandage cuts down on my vision."

The letter from George Bayliss was a curious document.

"My dear Gilmore," it began, "I am not quite sure why I feel I have to write to you. It may be because you are a man whom Peggy admired and respected so that in explaining to you that I was not directly responsible for Peggy's death, I am coming as close as I can to explaining to Peggy. Or perhaps I am merely trying to justify myself to myself. At any rate, here is the whole tragic story, or at least my part of it, from the beginning.

"You may not have known that I was a member of the Communist Party—at least until this past week. Peggy knew, and it was one of the reasons for our separation. She might have gone on supporting me, if I had left the Party. But I made my choice, and although I have regretted it since many times, I doubt if the final outcome would have been different had I decided otherwise.

"About a week before Peggy's death, I was called in by one of the top Party men in Chicago, actually the Midwest chief for our direct-action apparatus. He had received a report from Froley in Northbank that puzzled him. Froley reported that he had carried out Emile's orders, and that the Army rations had been successfully poisoned according to instructions. My chief immediately suspected either a counter-espionage coup, or an agent-provocateur, inasmuch as no sabotage had been ordered in Northbank. Furthermore, none of our agents in the Midwest was using the name of Emile; the name was retired when Zina failed to deliver the book that you brought from Europe. So I was sent to Northbank to investigate.

"The defection of Zina had come to light by this time, and I thought the use of the name of Emile indicated that you yourself might be the agent-provocateur in the case. In any event, it was apparent that the investigation would keep me in Northbank for some time, so I signed on at Barzac in order to be able to frequent the plant without arousing suspicion. My first contact with Froley told me two things: That although 'Emile'

might well be an agent-provocateur, he could also be someone with a grudge against Barzac, someone who knew Froley was a Party member and was using him; and also that Froley was in deadly fear of being caught. Froley was convinced that you were spying on him through his wife, and announced his intention of scaring you off, or, if that didn't work, of worse. At this point, I called Peggy to warn you, not for your sake, Gilmore, because I wasn't sure what your role was, but because I thought that Peggy might somehow get involved in this through you, and I still loved Peggy, believe it or not.

"That is why I first ransacked Peggy's apartment, to make sure you had not planted *Émile* with her. I went through your place as a double check, although I was sure you would not keep the book in your possession. And I finally thought of Barbara, where I actually found it. . . ."

"Hey!" Gilmore interrupted, "Where the hell is that book? Is that package you've got there—?"

"Don't be rude while I'm reading," Barbara said. She went on: "I could find no clue to the identity of the 'Emile' who had ordered the poisoning. He communicated with Froley only by telephone. I listened to part of one conversation, if it could be called a conversation. Froley could not identify the voice, so I thought perhaps I could. It was impossible. The voice was of an unnaturally low pitch, as if it had been recorded, and the recording played back at reduced speed."

"I did not tell Froley that 'Emile' was not a bona-fide C.P. agent, and Froley had been in the Party long enough to realize that it was routine for a member not to know the identity of any but a very few comrades with whom he worked. But when Froley showed me the dynamite and fuses which he had been told to take home, I was convinced that he was being used not only as a tool but as the fall guy. When the axe fell, it was Froley who would be revealed as the arch-conspirator and dangerous saboteur with his house full of explosives."

"When Peggy died, Froley lost his head completely. He was mad with fear. He was determined to kill you before you could

worm any secrets out of Frances. He was afraid Frances might betray him out of spite for his many infidelities. He went to your garage with several sticks of dynamite, and planned to booby-trap your car that night. You surprised him, however, and he ran."

"And I grabbed him," Gilmore interrupted. "That explains why my mother smelled camphor on my hands."

Barbara resumed reading: "I then talked him into moving the dynamite to my room, where I helped him fuse the three sticks that were ultimately supposed to blow you up. When he went home, I removed the percussion caps, and packed the fuse-ends with damp earth—not for any humanitarian reasons, Gilmore, but because I was under instructions to prevent any further overt act. I couldn't prevent Froley from installing the booby trap in your car during the funeral, but I knew it would not explode and I removed the evidence the first chance I got.

"Froley's final orders from 'Emile' came Friday afternoon. He was to go to your house at ten o'clock, to wait for you to come home, and to strangle you. Evidently 'Emile' had decided Froley had served his purpose, and had best be eliminated before he was arrested and questioned. He seems to have known that the law was about to lay hands on Froley, and also that you would not be home at ten."

Gilmore interrupted again. "Of course he knew! He was in Evans's office when you and I made a date for dinner, Barbie."

Barbara continued reading: "At the time, I didn't know that 'Emile's' summons was a death warrant for Froley. I thought that 'Emile' had adopted the Froley thesis of Gilmore-is-a-spy and therefore Gilmore must go. It was at this point that I made a decision of my own.

"I'd become a Communist for the same reason that you got to be a Democrat or a Republican or whatever you are. It was a matter of domestic politics. I believed the Party stood for a better way of life for me and people like me. It was against the things I hated: Government by lobby; power deriving from



money, instead of from ability or experience or the will of the people; race prejudice; monopoly for personal profit; exploitation of the have-nots. It had seemed to me a human and humane political philosophy.

"And then, gradually, communism changed—or I changed. The Party's interest in domestic issues dwindled to those it could use to exploit its own ends. And the ends were no longer the ends I wanted. I was no longer working for greater happiness for the greater number, the welfare of the little man, or the liberty of the oppressed. I was a conspirator for a foreign power that practised the very oppression I hated. There was no more humanity in anything we did. It was all discipline, unreasoning obedience, mechanical, unquestioning carrying out of instructions from above.

"A rather stupid little man who thought he was carrying out Party orders because they happened to coincide with the Party line, unwittingly killed Peggy, the only woman I have ever loved. And I, carrying out instructions from above, could not attend Peggy's funeral because I had to prevent the rather stupid little man from doing something else which was not desired by his superiors. So when I found that the same man, still under the impression that he was taking Party orders, prepared to kill you, I came to a decision: 'To hell with dialectic materialism. I'm going to be a human being again.'

"So I got hold of Frances Froley—"

"Say!" Gilmore broke in. "How's Frankie doing, in all this?"

"Fine," said Dr. Coffee. "She'll be back to the carrots in a day or two. Meanwhile she's having the time of her life. She's surrounded by reporters and photographers."

"So I got hold of Frances Froley," Barbara continued reading. "I knew that she was terrified of her husband, who had been getting more surly and threatening every day; and that she looked upon you, Gilmore, as a sort of god who could somehow solve all her problems. I didn't share 'Emile's' knowledge that you wouldn't be home at ten o'clock, so I primed Frances to keep you away from home from ten o'clock on, for as long



as she could manage it. After that, I had planned to meet you with her and to tell you what I am now forced to write, because things went wrong. I wanted you to know these things, because once I got back to Chicago, nobody knows what might happen.

"I decided to go to Chicago and turn in my card, because there was no other way that seemed right under the circumstances. I thought of running to the F.B.I., but that wouldn't have been right for me either, because part of the responsibility for this, even for Peggy's death, was mine. I played ball with these men for years, and I want them to know that I am quitting, that I no longer think as they think, and will no longer act as they want me to act.

"I'm also going back to help Zina, if I can, although I'm afraid I'm too late for that. Zina was in Chicago last I heard, but it looks very much as though she has paid in full for whatever she did to you.

"I am entrusting this letter to Frances Froley with full confidence that she will get it to your hands. Frankie is very much for Frankie, which means that she is on your side. She realized that Froley was about to go down for the last time, even before I prompted her. She looks on you, therefore, as a symbol of security in the future. After all, you got her in the newsreels.

"Enclosed you will find the key to self-checking locker R-370 at the Northbank airport. It contains your copy of *Émile*. Do with it as you see fit."

"Hey!" interrupted Gilmore. "Where's that key?"

"At the airport," Barbara said. "I opened the locker in the presence of the airport manager and two policemen." She took the package from her lap and tossed it to the bed. "Here's your *Émile*," she said.

"Call Stapp," Gilmore said. "Get me the F.B.I. right away."

"Wait until I finish reading," Barbara said. She went on: "It's a funny thing, Gilmore, but it looks as if the old adage—what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander—may not apply in this case. The same set of circumstances that has crystallized

my decision to quit the Party may very well make you say, 'This is the sort of thing that would make a Communist of anybody.' I've watched the way the newspapers have been preparing a sort of moral lynching for you. Because you once had a yen for Zina, they'll be painting you as a renegade, a rogue, a traitor, and a menace to national security. They'll probably be after your job, and I wouldn't be surprised if the younger patriotic bastards started throwing stones through your windows. It's disgusting and revolting and enough to turn anybody's stomach. But I've known you long enough to appreciate your ornery qualities. I know you'll fight back. It will be nasty and discouraging, but you'll win in the end, because this is fundamentally a decent country and most of the people in it have a deep-rooted sense of justice and fair play.

"Good luck, Gilmore, and forgive me.

"GEORGE BAYLISS"

No one spoke after Barbara had finished reading. Gilmore was blowing his nose when the phone at his bedside gave off a timid little tinkle. He picked up the instrument.

"Maternity ward," Gilmore said. "Oh, hello, Mr. Evans. I was just going to call you to thank you for a most pleasant vacation. I'm enjoying the modern conveniences in quiet, restful surroundings with excellent recreation facilities, lots of pretty nurses, good, wholesome food—! What? . . . Tomorrow? . . . I hardly think my medical advisers would want me to cut short my vacation so soon, Mr. Evans. . . . Yes, I know, but things are in extremely competent hands. Miss Wall is a very able young woman, and— What? . . . I see. Well, I'll speak to the doctor, and let you know tomorrow. Goodnight, Mr. Evans."

Gilmore pointed the receiver reproachfully at Barbara before he replaced it.

"Miss Wall," he said solemnly. "I have just been informed by Mr. Evans that you have resigned your position with the Barzac Soup Company. Is this true?"

"I forgot to tell you," Barbara said. "I quit this afternoon."

"Why, Miss Wall?"

"When I discovered this afternoon that I was being used to help kick you around," Barbara said, "it suddenly occurred to me that . . . well, that this *is* fundamentally a decent country and most of the people in it have a deep-rooted sense of justice and fair play."

"If I were a healthy man, Miss Wall," Gilmore said, "I should leap out of bed and kiss you."

Dr. Coffee cleared his throat. "Come on, Max. I think we'd better be going."

"Just a minute, folks," Gilmore said. "I'll never sleep tonight unless you answer one question. How did you criminologists come to put the finger on Remington?"

"You tell 'em, Doc," Ritter said. "I was just the leg man."

"It was a fairly simple matter," Dr. Coffee said, "as soon as I got an answer to the first question that came to mind when I discovered that Peggy Bayliss had died of arsenic poisoning. The question was: Why would anyone wishing to poison rations intended for the Army choose arsenic, which is the simplest of all poisons to detect and which can be recognized in the bodies of its victims for years after death? A few days later I added a supplementary question: Why would a conspirator against the armed forces poison only nine batches of rations, knowing that the rigid system of checks and inspections at Barzac canneries would certainly preclude repeating the process, even if he got away with it the first time?"

"The answer to both questions, of course, was that the plot against the American Army was not at all the motivation for this series of crimes. The criminal did not want the poison plot to go undetected. On the contrary, he took precautions that it should not only be uncovered, but uncovered with great publicity. Miss Wall tells us that she now remembers that it was Remington who first suggested publicizing Barzac's creation of the new rations for the Army, and that he suggested inviting the photographers to the testing sessions. Knowing the thor-

oughness of Barzac's testing and tasting routines, he could be relatively sure that his scandal would break within a very short time. And knowing this, I think we can assume that he suggested to the press that reporters attend Peggy's funeral, just to whet their curiosity further."

"What started you thinking in this direction?" Gilmore asked.

"Rabbit," said the pathologist. "Our lunch with Lenormand at Raoul's on Saturday. You may remember how furious the chef was over the fuss the executives were making because Barzac shares had dropped sharply in Wall Street. He talked about the lucky break it would be for anyone with enough money to buy control of a top-flight soup-making firm for half price. That remark put me on the right track. If we could find someone who was buying heavily as the Barzac shares went down, it would indicate that the whole plot was devised to discredit Barzac, to drive the stock down until, buying on margin with comparatively little money, he could secure a controlling interest in the cannery.

"Max went to New York, canvassed the brokerage houses, and discovered that the buyer was Remington—the man who expected to make himself boss of Barzac. At the same time, Dr. Mookerji here established evidence that Froley's body had been transported in the trunk compartment of Remington's car.

"I doubt if Froley's murder was part of Remington's original plan, although the plan was undoubtedly an outgrowth of Remington's discovery that Froley was down on Barzac's books as a Commie. It was evidently Remington who took the F.B.I. letter from Evans's desk to insure Froley's usefulness for a while as a stooge in arranging the details of the arsenic, and the goat whenever detection should come. When his usefulness had ended, and there was a chance that he might try to find the identity of 'Emile,' he was liquidated. And the dramatic production of his body in the cannery was just another step in Remington's campaign of unfavorable publicity for Barzac."

"I must remind Mr. Evans," Gilmore said, "to thank my mother for having Matilija poppies in her garden."

"Well, goodnight," Dr. Coffee said. "Come on, Max."

The bedside telephone again tinkled gently. "Hello," said Gilmore. "Oh, hello, Victoria . . . Fine. Fine . . . No, there's not a word of truth in it. You mustn't believe everything you hear on the radio. . . . Yes, I'm perfectly all right. In fact, I was just going to call you and tell you I probably wouldn't be home tonight. . . . Yes, I'm thinking of making a night of it. . . . A friend . . . Sure, a girl friend . . . Well, it's hard to say. She has a dual personality. When she's good, she's very, very good, and when she's bad, she's— What? . . . Oh, right now she's very, very terrific. I must introduce her to you some time. . . . Goodnight, Victoria."

A nurse came in, bearing a thermometer and a glass of some rose-colored liquid.

"You'll have to go now, miss," she said. "The doctor wants Mr. Gilmore to get some sleep. Drink this, Mr. Gilmore."

"Never," Gilmore protested. "You've put grenadine in it."

"Dr. Green said you're to drink it," the nurse insisted. "It's a sedative."

"Well, goodnight, Gil," Barbara said. "I'll be in to see you tomorrow."

"I may be in the office tomorrow," Gilmore said, "but drop in anyway. If you're looking for a job, why don't you consider something like public relations for a big canned-soup company? I think I could get you an interview. And it's fascinating work. You meet such interesting people."



## XXVIII

CHICAGO, Wednesday (A.P.).—The body of a man tentatively identified as George Bayliss, one-time left-wing journalist, was found floating in the Drainage Canal early today. He had been shot six times.

Police are withholding comment pending a positive identification of his fingerprints by the F.B.I. in Washington.













